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## Supervising paraeducators: Practices and perceptions of special education teachers

Loury Ollison Floyd

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**SUPERVISING PARAEDUCATORS: PRACTICES AND  
PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Loury Ollison Floyd

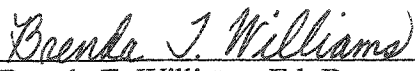
January 2004


**SUPERVISING PARAEDUCATORS: PRACTICES AND  
PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

By Loury Ollison Floyd

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Approved January 30, 2004

  
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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to some very special people who have not only loved, but supported and encouraged me through the years. I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Kevin, who is the reason I began this program in the first place. Kevin constantly reminded me that this was just a process and that together we could get through it. It is also dedicated to my five-year-old son, Tobias, who patiently waited for mommy to either get home from class or off the computer so that we could enjoy some play time; and my son to be born in a few months, Jadon, who turned out to be a surprise blessing to us all.

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# **SUPERVISING PARAEDUCATORS: PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the perceptions of special education teachers regarding their supervision of paraeducators to aid in determining the need to provide educators with professional development in supervisory practices. The numbers of paraeducators in school settings have continued to increase, thus causing roles for both teachers and paraeducators to evolve. This descriptive study examined six key supervisory functions and how special education teachers provide supervision to paraeducators. Questions regarding the teacher's role as a supervisor were adapted from Pickett's (1999) framework, which addresses five areas: planning work assignments, directing tasks, monitoring performance, evaluating performance, and on-the-job training and mentoring. For the purposes of this study, a sixth area, clarifying roles, was added. Directing tasks was also amended to include delegating. The results of the study supported Pickett's (1999) framework and added further information that can enhance effective paraeducator supervision in inclusive classrooms. Specifically, results indicated that planning, formal or informal, between special education teachers and paraeducators does not exist to the extent that it should. This study also supported early concerns in the literature that teachers do very little directing and delegating of tasks to paraeducators. Finally, this study found that there is minimal preparation and professional development of special education teachers who supervise paraeducators for this role.

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**SUPERVISING PARAEDUCATORS: PRACTICES AND  
PERCEPTIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Several researchers assert that one of the most important, but under-recognized human resources available to teachers is the paraeducator workforce (French, 1999; Pickett, 1999; Pickett, Vasa, & Steckelberg, 1993). Pickett (1999), director of the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (NRCP), defines a paraeducator as a school employee who works under the supervision of a certified or licensed staff member to support and assist in providing instruction and other services to children, youth and their families. The prefix "para" means "along side of," so by definition a paraeducator works alongside an educator (e.g., a teacher specialist, related service provider).

While there is support for the importance of paraeducator roles, it also has been noted that paraeducators are not supervised appropriately. Thus issues related to effective supervision of paraeducators are frequently mentioned in professional literature (D'Aquanni, 1997; Guess, Smith, & Entsminger, 1971; MacKenzie & Houk, 1986). These issues include the need for planning assignments, directing or delegating tasks, clarifying roles, mentoring and training; and require more detailed examination. This study examined each of these issues more thoroughly.

### Overview of the Study

This study provides insight into the supervision of paraeducators by special education teachers serving students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Chapter One



includes the introduction, purpose of the study, research questions, limitations of the study, significance of the study, and an overview of paraeducators and their supervision. Chapter Two contains a review of the literature related to the supervision of paraeducators with an emphasis on a framework developed by Anna Lou Pickett in 1999. Chapter Three identifies the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. Chapter Four presents the results of data analysis. Finally, Chapter Five includes a summary and recommendations for further study.

### Background of the Problem

Issues related to the supervision of paraeducators have gained prominence as the roles for both paraeducators and teachers have evolved, with an increasing number of paraeducators working in classrooms (Pickett, 1997). In the past, paraeducators spent most of their time completing clerical tasks, but now they serve in more instructional positions with teachers acting as their managers. Despite the growing number of paraeducators in the workforce, there is no research base supporting their supervision in school settings that reflects this growth. As a result, paraeducators frequently learn how to carry out their job responsibilities through trial and error and on-the-job learning experiences (D'Aquanni, 1997; Mueller, 1997).

Additionally, teachers often feel that they are unprepared to supervise paraeducators in school settings (French, 1998; Frith & Lindsey, 1982; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Teacher preparation programs have not changed to meet the need to prepare teachers for the supervisory role they must assume with the growing numbers of paraeducators (Pickett, 1993). As Pickett et al. (1993) pointed out, "in far too many cases, teachers are not prepared to direct paraeducators, to evaluate their performance, to

provide feedback and training, or to assess the potential for greater use of paraeducators in order to free teachers to provide increased instructional services” (p. 31). As well as being the primary educators in the classroom, teachers have evolved into paraeducators’ day-to-day supervisors (Pickett, 1997), a role that few teachers are prepared to assume.

In addition to challenges presented by the lack of supervisory preparation, teachers and paraeducators often have differing perceptions of the teachers’ supervisory role and responsibilities (D’Aquanni, 1997; Milner, 1998; Mueller, 1997). In an effort to address this confusion, Pickett (1999) developed a framework consisting of the primary components of effective supervision of paraeducators, which includes planning work assignments, task directing and delegating, role clarifying, daily performance monitoring, evaluating, and providing systematic on-the-job training and mentoring. Addressing the problems of supervisory training for teachers and the differing perceptions of the teacher’s supervisory role is important because federal and state legislation now mandates appropriate supervision of paraeducators.

#### *The Need to Study Paraeducator Supervision*

The need to study how paraeducators are supervised becomes more apparent when recent changes in their numbers and employment practices are reviewed. In the early 1960s, there were approximately 10,000 paraeducators working in schools, primarily in non-instructional capacities. In the mid 1990s, the estimated number of paraeducators was between 500,000 and 700,000 nationwide (Pickett, 1996). Thus, in three decades, the number increased 50 to 70 times. Interestingly, the number of children served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act increased from 4,760,999 in the 1990-

1991 school year to 6,195,113 in the 1999-2000 academic year (United States Department of Education, 2001). Between the 1960s and 1990s mainstreaming students with disabilities, beginning of the Regular Education Initiative, and progressing toward inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classroom setting may have led to the increased use of paraeducators in school settings. A report from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1998) notes the intent of using paraeducators is to enhance the work of the teacher or service provider. As the need for special education services has increased, so has the demand for paraeducators to serve as vital resources in the classroom.

Paraeducators are often utilized in the school setting to provide both direct and indirect services to students with disabilities. Provisions of the IDEA (1997) have contributed to the increasing use of paraeducators in schools today. In part, paraeducators are used to support students in the least restrictive environment possible as mandated by IDEA and best practice (Dover, 2001; French & Pickett, 1997). According to IDEA, students with disabilities are educated with their nondisabled peers in the same school and same class they would normally attend if they did not have a disability. IDEA, reauthorized in 1997, specifically identifies the need for paraeducator training and supervision (C.F.R. sec. 300.382(b), 300.136(f)). Federal mandates as well as the growing numbers of support personnel in schools support the importance of understanding how teachers and paraeducators view the supervisory process (IDEA, 1997).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, the newly revised legislation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, serves as the central federal law in

precollegiate education. At the core of the NCLB (PL 107 110, Title I, Part A, § 1119a.2) are a number of measures designed to ensure broad gains in student achievement and to hold state departments of education and schools more accountable for student progress. Thus, increased expectations for annual testing, academic progress, report cards, literacy, fiscal support changes, and qualifications of educational personnel represent significant changes in education for pre-kindergarten through grade 12. These changes apply to paraeducators as well. Specifically, within three years, all school-based paraeducators hired with Title I money must have completed at least two years of college, obtained an associate's degree or higher, or met an established quality standard. This requirement went into effect immediately after the passage of NCLB for newly hired paraeducators serving students in Title I programs. It is expected that this requirement will have an impact on the employment, training, and development of all paraeducators, including those working in special education settings.

NCLB impacts teachers because it prohibits assigning paraeducators in Title I supported programs to provide direct instruction to students unless they are under the direct supervision of a teacher. However, it does not specify what direct supervision entails. These requirements heighten the need for adequate preparation and professional development for teachers supervising paraeducators. This study provides insight about the current preparation and supervisory practices of special education teachers supervising paraeducators in inclusive settings.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of special education teachers regarding their supervision of paraeducators to determine if there is a need to

provide educators with professional development in supervisory practices. Specific questions regarding the teacher's role as a supervisor were adapted from Pickett's (1999) framework, which addresses six areas: planning, task directing and delegating, role clarifying, daily performance monitoring, evaluating performance, and systematic on-the-job training and mentoring.

### Research Questions

While many studies have noted a need for effective paraeducator supervision, empirical research on this topic is limited. The questions guiding this study considered the nature of supervisory practices of special education teachers who work with paraeducators in inclusive settings. Specific questions developed from Pickett's (1999) framework, and discussed in Chapter Two, serve as the lenses that frame this study. This framework assumes that the special education teacher is in fact performing the role of a supervisor. The research questions are:

1. What are the supervisory practices of special education teachers who work with paraeducators in inclusive settings?
2. What are the perceptions of special education teachers regarding their preparation to supervise paraeducators?
3. To what extent do special education teachers engage in the following supervisory functions: (a) planning work assignments, (b) directing or delegating tasks, (c) clarifying roles, (d) monitoring performance, (e) evaluating performance, and (f) training and mentoring paraeducators?
4. What is the relationship between special education teachers' supervisory practices and specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators?

### Definition of Terms

Several specific terms are used in this study related to the supervision of paraeducators serving students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Operational definitions of these terms are provided below.

*Paraeducator* - A school employee who works under the supervision of a certified or licensed professional to support and assist in providing instruction and other services to students and families (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). Other titles include paraprofessional, teaching assistant, teacher aide, and instructional assistant.

*Supervising teacher* - A general education or special education teacher who is responsible for supervising and integrating paraeducators into various learning environments (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

*Guiding principles* - Statements of beliefs that provide a philosophical framework on which state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and other agencies can build to ensure appropriate team roles, supervision, and professional development and respect for paraeducators (Pickett, 1999).

*Supervision* – Within the context of this study, supervision is carried out by special education teachers who are employed by the school district and are responsible for the oversight of adults employed to assist in providing instruction to students with disabilities. Therefore, supervision is leadership related to the process of instruction and includes the sharing of information, ideas, and opinions to ensure that the instructional goals of students are met.

*Dimensions of supervision* - An operational definition of instructional supervision of paraeducators, derived from Pickett's (1999) framework. It includes: (a) planning work

assignments; (b) directing or delegating tasks to paraeducators; (c) sharing information with paraeducators regarding roles; (d) monitoring day-to-day performance of paraeducators; (e) evaluating the performance of paraeducators, and (f) providing systematic on-the-job training and mentoring to paraeducators.

*Inclusive education* – For the purpose of this study, inclusive education refers to the education of students with disabilities in general education settings.

*Paraeducator professional development* – Training programs or initiatives specifically designed to help paraeducators gain a better understanding of their roles and prepare them to work effectively with other educators in various educational settings.

*Pull-out special education support teacher* – A teacher who works in a traditional resource classroom setting with students with special needs and provides academic support to students who may be receiving services in an inclusive education classroom.

*Inclusive support teacher* – A teacher who works alongside another educator delivering instruction to a group of students with diverse learning needs. The inclusive support teacher may also consult with general education teachers to address the needs of students with disabilities in the general classroom setting.

### Significance of the Study

Designed to gain information about the supervision of paraeducators in a school district, this study contributes substantive information about how special education teachers in inclusive settings view their supervisory practices. Results of this study have training implications for professional development personnel, teachers who provide instructional supervision to paraeducators, and for paraeducators. In response to the growing numbers of paraeducators in school settings today and the limited amount of

research on the topic of their supervision, this research makes a contribution to the knowledge base of current practices in supervising support personnel in public schools.

#### Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are aspects of a study that the researcher knows may negatively affect the results or generalizability of results, but over which the researcher had no control (Gay & Airasian, 2000). This study was limited to one school district in southeast Virginia. Special education teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools were the participants. Participants were limited to volunteers, which limits the generalizability of results. Additionally, teacher perceptions and practices of paraeducator supervision were obtained through a survey dependent upon teacher self-report. This assumes that the responses of participants were an accurate representation of actual practice. It was assumed that a sufficient number of special education teachers would return the instrument to allow for meaningful conclusions to be drawn from the data.

Delimitations are defined as limitations the researcher has imposed or intentionally not addressed in the study that would also limit generalizations (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The target population of the study was limited to currently employed special education teachers from one local school district, who have responsibility for supervising paraeducators in inclusive settings.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

This chapter begins with a review of the literature pertaining to the supervision of paraeducators. Specific topics include challenges in supervising educational paraeducators, policies and regulations governing their supervision, federal regulations and policy, paraeducator supervision, guiding principles for paraeducator employment, roles, preparation, and supervision, key supervisory functions, as well as teacher and paraeducator training. The chapter also presents a research synthesis concerning paraeducator supervision, specifically related to Pickett's (1999) framework, which includes information pertaining to (a) how teachers plan work assignments for paraeducators; (b) how teachers delegate tasks to paraeducators; (c) how the day-to-day performance of paraeducators is monitored and evaluated; and (d) how on-the-job training and mentoring are utilized to assist paraeducators. These five supervisory functions began the foundation of an adapted framework which focuses this study. A review of the literature not only supports these five functions, but also provides the rationale for including role clarification (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; French, 1997; McClain, 1993; Milner, 1998; Prigge, 1996; Rose, 2000) as a sixth supervisory function. While these six skill sets are general supervisory tasks, research indicates that schools are not currently providing this level of supervision to paraeducators (Frank, Keith, & Steil, 1988; French, 1997; Hoover, 1999; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). The review

of literature will provide a basis to explain why the six supervisory elements will serve as the framework for this study (Appendix A).

Paraeducators in educational settings have been the focus of much research (D'Aquanni, 1997; Dover, 2001; French, 1998; Guess et al., 1971; Holder, 1997; MacKenzie & Houk, 1986; Pickett, 1997). However, few researchers have specifically addressed the issue of paraeducator supervision.

To conduct a thorough review of the literature, several search methods were used. Computerized database searches including ERIC, Infotrac, and Dissertation Abstracts International resulted in numerous journal articles, books, and dissertations which were all used to locate information. Search terms on computerized databases included, but were not limited to, *supervision*, *paraeducators*, *paraprofessionals*, and *paraprofessional supervision*. These terms were often paired with others, such as *special education* and *administration*. The searches extended from 1970 through 2003, a period that has seen change in employment and utilization of paraeducators and demand for their supervision. Communications via telephone, e-mail, and face to face with various researchers in the field, including Wendy Dover, Nancy French, and Kent Gerlach, led to the identification of additional sources.

Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2001) provide a definition of supervision as "leadership for the improvement of instruction" (p. 10), proposing that such a definition allows for instructional leadership to be viewed as a function and process rather than a role or position. To that end, educators throughout the system can engage in the function and process of supervision, regardless of their position or title. While personnel working under the title of supervisor often function in supervision, many others

do as well. The job description is the driving force to whether or not they are involved in supervision. Clearly, special education teachers who have paraeducators working with them to meet the needs of students with disabilities on their caseload have supervisory responsibilities.

### Challenges in Supervising Educational Paraeducators

As mentioned, the importance of paraeducator supervision is reinforced in legislation, necessitated by increasing employment figures, and considered responsible practice. First, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires states and localities to address the identified needs for inservice and preservice preparation to ensure that all personnel who work with children with disabilities have the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of these children (CFR sec. 300.382(b), 300.136(f)). This mandate applies to both professional and paraeducator personnel who provide special education, general education, related services, or early intervention services. The IDEA also calls for supervision of paraeducators, which continues to be an unclear area for school personnel, as many are unsure of who actually supervises the paraeducator-the special education teacher, the general education teacher, or the building level administrator.

Second, the substantial increase in the number of paraeducators in the workforce, as well as changes in their job descriptions over the past 20 years, compounds the challenges of supervising paraeducators. The use of paraeducators began in the 1950s during an era of post-World War II teacher shortages (Jones & Bender, 1993) because many parents of youth with disabilities sought alternatives to traditional institutional settings. The early 1970s also saw a dramatic increase in the number of paraeducators

with the inception of special education programs in public schools, when they were hired to assist teachers with the delivery of special education services to children and youth with disabilities. According to Jones and Bender (1993), in 1965 fewer than 10,000 paraeducators were employed in public schools. Today the number of paraeducators is estimated to be between 500,000 and 700,000 (The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education, 2000). In spite of growing numbers, Jones and Bender conclude, “there is a relative lack of evidence attesting to the efficacy of paraprofessionals in enhancing student outcomes” (p. 7). Nevertheless, in schools today, paraeducators are responsible for numerous duties, many of which focus on or revolve around direct interaction with children and youth with disabilities. Paraeducators’ roles and responsibilities have grown to include tasks such as monitoring students’ academic and behavioral progress as well as participating in the delivery of instruction. French (1998) states, “in the past, paraprofessionals often performed clerical tasks such as duplicating materials” (p. 357).

Finally, these increased numbers and changing responsibilities of paraeducators have forced teachers into assuming supervisory roles. Unfortunately, teachers often feel unqualified to supervise paraeducators and are reluctant to provide supervision to paraeducators (Dover, 2001; French, 1998; Likins & Morgan, 1999). Most teachers prefer working with paraeducators who require little supervision. In referring to her work investigating supervisory practices, French explains, “Some teachers failed to distinguish between the ethical and legal responsibilities of the professional teacher and those tasks appropriately delegated to a paraeducator, describing the paraeducator as a peer rather

than a supervisee” (p. 365). Lack of role clarification further complicates the supervisory issue.

### Policies and Regulations Governing Paraeducators and Their Supervision

Current research is primarily driven by policy governing paraeducators and their supervision. This is important because accountability is critical in all areas of public education today, and until recently, there were few regulations for the employment of paraeducators. However, due to the increased reliance on paraeducators, there are now state and federal guidelines mandating their training and supervision. For example, State Education Agencies (SEAs) must now provide leadership in the development of standards to ensure that all personnel, including paraeducators, are adequately and appropriately supervised (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Thus, IDEA and Title I both include regulations governing paraeducator training and supervision.

Reauthorization of the IDEA (1997) prompted increased interest in paraeducator issues. This law allows for “paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities” (20 U.S.C. [sections] 1412 (a)(15)(B)(iii). IDEA also provides requirements for paraeducator training and supervision (1997).

Title I, the largest program of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), formerly the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was originally designed to assist low-performing students who were considered to be economically disadvantaged. Reauthorized in 2001, Title I recognizes the important role of paraeducators. In October 1999, the United States House of Representatives approved a bill stating that

not later than three years after enactment, all paraprofessionals will need to have: completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education; or obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or met a rigorous standard of quality established at the state or local level, which includes assessment of math, reading, and writing. (U.S. House of Representatives, 1999)

Earlier, federal government included paraeducators under general requirements for professional development with an option for career ladder programs. Federal legislation under NCLB now mandates the educational qualifications for paraeducators. This means that paraeducators nationally have to meet minimum standards to qualify for their positions.

#### State Regulations and Policies

Many variations exist in state regulations and policy that guide the employment of paraeducators working in both general and special education settings (American Federation of Teachers, 1998; Prigge, 1996). For example, Iowa is working toward paraeducator licensure that would entail 45 hours of instruction and training. Both Washington and Iowa have established core competencies for paraeducators (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Policy Paper, 1999). Other states are exploring career ladders and have identified standards for paraeducators. While some states have established more in-depth policies and procedures for paraeducator employment and supervision, a majority of states, including Virginia, have yet to define these (Chissom, 2002).

Although paraeducators can provide support in any kind of classroom setting, there has been a growing trend to utilize them in the area of special education. Frith and

Lindsey (1982) conducted a survey of SEAs to collect, synthesize, evaluate, and disseminate data on special education paraeducator certification, training, and other programming variables. Drawing on topical issues gleaned from a review of professional literature and informal communication with leaders in the paraeducator movement, they developed a questionnaire to investigate SEA personnel certification, training and programming variables nationwide. The questionnaire was sent to all 50 states, asking state directors of special education or their designated representatives to complete the questionnaires. The response rate was 88%, with 44 states responding.

Most states (42) reported that they did not have certification standards for special education paraeducators (Frith & Lindsey, 1982). Eighty-six percent of the respondents indicated that LEAs could employ whomever they desired as special education paraeducators, but only 58% agreed with this policy. Sixty percent agreed that certification requirements should be more rigorous. Ninety-four percent indicated that the ideal duration of a certificate for special education paraeducators should be five years or less, with a requirement to update skills for renewal. Fifty-eight percent noted that paraeducator training was the responsibility of the LEA. In addition, 72% responded that training programs did not require state board of education approval. Almost all respondents (97%) indicated that hands-on-experience with children with disabilities should be included in the training of special education paraeducators.

The survey also identified several concerns related to the employment of paraeducators. These include paraeducators not being properly utilized by teachers, inadequate formal training programs about the needs of children, the relationships

between teachers and paraeducators, a false sense of paraeducator's self-importance, and effective relationships with administrators and children.

Frith and Lindsey's study had several limitations. First, there was a lack of consistency in the capacity of respondents to answer the items on the questionnaire appropriately, which may indicate a wide disparity among states' interpretations of special education and the paraeducator concept. Additionally, since the study focused on the state level, day-to-day practitioners did not participate. Even with these limitations, the study sheds light on the fact that in 1982 there were wide discrepancies among states regarding the employment of paraeducators. More contemporary research supports that this continues to be an issue (e.g., Dover, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

#### Paraeducators in General Education Classrooms

The least restrictive environment provision (LRE) in the IDEA created a presumption favoring the placement of educating children with disabilities in general education classroom settings (McLeskey, Henry, & Axelrod, 1999; Treder, Morse, & Ferron, 2000) and limited the removal of students with disabilities from the general classroom. This provision required assurance from the states that children with disabilities be educated with children who do not have disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate. Thus, students with disabilities were removed from general education classes only when the curriculum and instruction could not be adapted so the student could benefit (McLeskey et al., 1999). Today, increasing numbers of students with disabilities are being educated in general education classrooms, often referred to as "inclusive classrooms" (Likins & Morgan, 1999; McLeskey, Henry, & Hodges, 1998). The inclusion of students with disabilities and their varying levels of need in the general instructional programs and curricula have compelled teachers, schools, and districts to



consider instructional alternatives and innovative uses of resources. In an effort to meet the needs of the classroom teachers and students with special needs, many school districts have hired paraeducators (Doyle, 1997; French & Pickett, 1997; Friend & Cook, 2000). This created new functions and roles for both general and special education classroom teachers.

### Paraeducator Supervision

Paraeducators play a vital role in schools today, with many supporting the instructional process for students with disabilities in classroom settings. It is important that they receive training and supervision. The literature has made it clear that both are necessary for paraeducators to maximize benefits to the students they work with daily. Unfortunately, many states and localities do not currently have structured training systems in effect, even though the IDEA mandates appropriate training and supervision. Many local education agencies are struggling to determine how to do this effectively and efficiently. Although the literature on paraeducators and their supervision is growing, the research identifying factors that contribute to effective training and supervisory programs is still limited. In 1998, the National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) reiterated the need for high standards and training and supervision of paraeducators.

There is a critical need for all programs that use paraprofessionals to adhere to [some form of standards] for use of paraprofessionals to ensure the provision of high quality services, use of well-qualified professionals and paraprofessionals, effective supervision, and coordinated service delivery by the qualified teacher/ service provider and paraprofessional team. (p. 1)

The NJCLD also stated “the intent of using paraprofessionals is to supplement not supplant the work of the teacher/service provider” (p. 1).

### *General Issues in Paraeducator Supervision*

This section on paraeducator supervision will highlight three studies (French, 1998; Marks, Schrader & Levine, 1999; MacKenzie & Houk, 1986) and provide an overview of general issues related to paraeducator supervision.

MacKenzie and Houk (1986) sought to examine how 23 resource teachers who worked with paraeducators perceived a need to modify the role played by the paraeducator. The researchers questioned the extent to which paraeducators were assigned tasks that were characteristics of special education instruction and whether resource teachers who worked with paraeducators perceived themselves as having sufficient input into the selection and training of paraeducators. Findings indicated that special education resource teachers specified a desire to be a part of the process of selecting and assigning paraeducators. In addition, several recommendations were made, including that “greater emphasis must be devoted to teacher-training programs to produce methods of using the paraprofessionals in special education settings” (p. 44). These conclusions support key supervisory functions for teachers working with paraeducators.

Twelve years after the MacKenzie and Houk study was published, French (1998) conducted a study that closely examined special education teacher supervisory practices in an attempt “to clarify teacher perceptions of paraeducators’ roles, preparation, and performance and to compare those perceptions to self-reports of paraeducators” (p. 358). The study also explored the duties these paraeducators performed, their preparation for

the job, the quality of their work, and the thinking of the teachers who held supervisory responsibility.

Eighteen teacher/paraeducator teams working in a single major urban school district were recruited for this study. Of the 18 matched pairs, 12 worked in elementary schools, 3 worked in high schools, and 3 in middle schools. Both paraeducators and teachers completed a brief parallel questionnaire. In addition, the paraeducators also completed a self-evaluation form and charted their daily activities by 10-minute intervals for two 1-week periods. The teachers were asked to evaluate paraeducator performance and participate in personal interviews.

When questioned about any training they may have received to prepare them to supervise paraeducators, 14 of the 18 teachers responded that they had acquired supervision skills on their own through personal experiences. Teachers often did not feel qualified to supervise paraeducators and were, therefore, reluctant to do so. The teachers were generally satisfied with their paraeducators, who often served in instructional roles. Although they valued these roles, the teachers clearly expressed a desire for paraeducators to come to the work place with greater training. Most indicated they preferred working with paraeducators who required little supervision. French (1998) found that teachers often had the responsibility of evaluating the paraeducator or co-evaluating the paraeducator with the principal.

French (1998) concluded that teachers are often reluctant to supervise paraeducators, particularly because they do not feel prepared to take on such a task. Based on her findings, French (1998) identified topics that may assist teachers in their supervisory tasks: "(a) knowledge of the legal limits of paraeducator authority, (b)

liability issues regarding the delivery of IEP services, (c) skills in task delegation, (d) conflict management and negotiation, and (e) creative problem solving” (p. 366).

French’s conclusion that “the working relationships of teachers and paraeducators as well as the supervisory skills and practices of teachers” (p. 367) need further research supports the current research project.

Marks et al. (1999) sought to explain the perspectives and experiences of 20 paraeducators who were working in inclusive educational placements in which the students all had disabilities and demonstrated significant behavioral challenges. Initial taped telephone interviews gathered background information, student information, and general experiences working as a paraeducator. Five of the paraeducators interviewed were identified for followup, in-depth interviews that allowed them to describe in more detail a typical day at school and elaborate on the various roles they assumed.

Themes emerging from the initial data analysis for the full sample group were identified, and presentation was subsequently made to a group of paraeducators who had not participated in the study to determine if these themes also captured their experiences. The paraeducators’ corroboration of the themes served to verify them. Results indicated that paraeducators assumed a variety of job responsibilities, such as providing instruction in academic and social skills; making curricular modifications; managing student behaviors; and developing working relationships with colleagues (p. 318). The absence of ongoing supervision and support provided by a special education teacher often led to paraeducators assuming duties more suited for the classroom teachers to perform, such as providing daily academic activities and making curriculum modifications for students.

This provides additional evidence of the need for the development of supervisory skills for special education teachers.

Training paraeducators and then sending them into classrooms to support students is not enough (Chissom, 2002; Dover, 2001; French, 1997, 1998). Studies have shown that paraeducators need ongoing supervision. French (1998) concluded that teaching paraeducators to use certain instructional strategies for teaching social skills to clients was inadequate without support, and that close monitoring was necessary for paraeducators to carry out tasks properly. French (1998) also noted that special education teachers are relatively ill equipped to assume the role of supervisor and, therefore, also need training.

#### Guiding Principles for Paraeducator Employment, Roles, Preparation, and Supervision

To assist states in clarifying the growing confusion surrounding the use of paraeducators, Pickett established the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services (NRCPE). This resource center, located in New York, helps school districts gain a more thorough understanding of paraeducators and their unique needs, including supervision. In 1999, as an outcome of research conducted by the NRCPE in conjunction with other statewide efforts, Pickett articulated eight standards or guiding principles (see Table 2.1) for paraeducator employment, roles, preparation, and supervision that a task force of professionals in the field had developed. The task force included administrators from local and state education agencies, teachers, paraeducators, parents, and representatives from both two - and four-year colleges who were chosen specifically because they were practitioners at the time and, therefore, familiar with the roles of paraeducators and the teachers who supervise them.

Table 2.1

*Guiding Principles for Paraeducator Employment, Roles, Preparation, and Supervision*

Guiding Principle	Description
Guiding Principle #1	Skilled paraeducators are employed to improve the quality of education and services in other provider systems and to help ensure supportive, inclusive, safe, and healthy learning environments for children, youth, and staff.
Guiding Principle #2	Administrators and teachers/providers create environments that recognize paraeducators as valued team members and effectively integrate them into teams.
Guiding Principle #3	Members of all program planning and implementation teams participate within clearly defined roles in changing, dynamic environments to provide learner-centered and individualized experiences and services for all children and youth and their families.
Guiding Principle #4	Paraeducators are respected and supported in their team roles by policymakers, administrators, teachers/providers, and families.
Guiding Principle #5	Standards for paraeducator roles and paraeducator development assure that they are assigned to positions for which they are qualified to have the skills required to assist teachers/providers to provide quality learning experiences and related services for all children and youth and their families.
Guiding Principle #6	Paraeducators receive pre- and inservice professional development provided by the district/agency and opportunities for continuing education or career advancement offered by institutions of higher education.
Guiding Principle #7	Teachers/providers responsible for supervising the work of paraeducators have the skills necessary to plan for, direct, provide on-the-job training for, monitor, and evaluate the skills of paraeducators.

*Note.* From "Strengthening and Supporting Teacher/Provider-Paraeducator Teams; Guidelines for Paraeducator Roles, Supervision, and Preparation," by A.L. Pickett, 1999, p. 7.

After compiling a literature review of relevant articles and studies, the group developed a national survey that was mailed to 700 people on the mailing list of the NRCPP, chosen because they were actively involved with paraeducators and/or their supervision. Analyzing data from the roughly 400 surveys that were completed and returned, the task force found agreement among respondents in describing the various tasks performed by both teachers and paraeducators in teacher/paraeducator dyads.

As a result, the task force developed guiding principles that describe the scope of the responsibilities of both paraeducators and the teachers who supervise them. These principles are outlined in Table 2.1. The work of the task force is significant because it represents the first time the roles of teachers and paraeducators were closely scrutinized together. Guiding Principle #7 provides the basis for this study's examination of how special education teachers supervise the paraeducators with whom they work (see Table 2.1).

Responsibility for the management and supervision of paraeducators is divided into two components. The first is the role and responsibility of district-level administrators, building principals, and program directors. The second is the supervisory role and responsibility of teachers (Pickett, 1999). Administrative personnel have operational responsibility for establishing and carrying out personnel practices connected with the employment, preparation, evaluation, and dismissal of paraeducators (French, 2003; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001), whereas teachers have responsibility for supervising and integrating paraeducators into learning environments.

Guiding Principle #7 outlines five key supervisory functions: (a) planning, (b) directing, (c) training, (d) monitoring, and (e) evaluating. These functions contributed to

the formation of a framework to focus the present study. A review of the literature not only supported these five functions, but also provided evidence about the need to include role clarification (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; French, 1997; McClain, 1993; Milner, 1998; Prigge, 1996; Rose, 2000) as a sixth supervisory function. The next section provides a synthesis of research and reviews research studies that discuss the six key supervisory functions.

#### Key Supervisory Functions for Teachers Working with Paraeducators

For the purpose of this study, six key supervisory functions for teachers working with paraeducators were used to analyze the supervisory practices of special education teachers in inclusive settings. In this section of the review, the supervisory elements (a) clarifying roles, (b) planning work assignments, (c) directing or delegating tasks, (d) monitoring performance, (e) evaluating performance, and (f) mentoring and on-the-job training will be presented in detail. It should be noted that these are not discrete functions. There is considerable overlap in the literature which is discussed later in this section. Results and major findings of recent studies conducted to help clarify what teacher supervision of paraeducators should entail are integrated throughout this section and highlighted as they pertain to inclusive settings and separate placements.

Altogether, nine studies published between 1990 and the present were analyzed in an attempt to gather relevant data about paraeducator supervision in school settings and further support Pickett's (1999) framework. Eight of the studies utilized qualitative research methods, and one study (Prigge, 1996) used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Seven of the eight studies included observations and interviews. Two (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997) conducted a document analysis and another (Prigge, 1996)



utilized survey data. Five of the eight studies focused primarily on the supervision of paraeducators (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; French, 1997; Jensen, Parsons, & Reid, 1998; Milner, 1998). The remainder documented critical information related to paraeducators with common findings that emerged in the data or recommendations. Three (French, 1997; Jensen et al., 1998; McClain, 1993) of the nine studies were conducted in separate placements, whereas the remainder were conducted in inclusive settings. Table 2.2 demonstrates how each study noted in this section relates to the six supervisory functions for teachers working with paraeducators.

### *Clarifying Roles*

The first supervisory function detailed in this study is role clarification. Clearly, both teachers and paraeducators must understand their individual roles in order to perform effectively. Roles should be discussed and clarified for paraeducators. For example, statewide survey of paraeducators in the Commonwealth of Virginia found that paraeducators when asked what preparation would have been most helpful prior to their first assignment desired training specific to their jobs as opposed to more general information about specific legal requirements (Chissom, 2002). Further, when designing roles and responsibilities, teachers should consider "experience, training, comfort level, time constraints, and knowledge levels of individual team members" (Pickett, 1997, p. 175). Supervising teachers should also consider assigning roles incrementally to correspond to the paraeducator's increasing skills, which is similar to the instructional practice teachers use with students, adding to their knowledge base after carefully determining that they have a sound understanding on which to build (Morgan &

Table 2.2

*Research Studies Highlighting the Key Supervisory Functions of Paraeducators*

Author/Year	Purpose							Methodology/ Sample	Results
		Clarifying	Planning	Directing	Monitoring	Mentoring	Evaluating		
Chissom (2002)	To examine how teachers supervise paraeducators in middle school classrooms.	X	X		X	X	X	Methodology: Interview, document analysis, and observations.  Sample: Two middle schools in Southwest Virginia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is more work to be done in order to maximize the supervisory skills of teachers.</li> <li>Collaborative training opportunities prevent misunderstandings and miscommunication.</li> </ul>
Rose (2000)	To examine the use of classroom support in a primary school with a high proportion of pupils with special needs.	X	X					Methodology: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the teachers in the sample.  Sample: 10 teachers (seven female; three male) and six pupils (four male; two female).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) can be used to support an entire class, rather than concentrating solely on one student.</li> <li>Defined roles and management responsibilities are an essential factor in ensuring that classroom support is focused on the needs of students.</li> </ul>
Milner (1998)	To describe the interactions of successful para-professionals with students with disabilities and general education teachers in inclusive settings.	X				X		Methodology: Qualitative design utilizing observations and interviews.  Sample: Three special education teachers, 11 general education teachers, three middle school students with disabilities, and six high school students with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deficits were noted in the area of communication regarding paraeducators' roles, responsibilities, and preparation.</li> <li>Deficits were found in the area of opportunities for training and modeling for paraeducators.</li> </ul>

Author/Year	Purpose							Methodology/ Sample	Results
		Clarifying	Planning	Directing	Monitoring	Mentoring	Evaluating		
Jensen, Parsons, & Reid (1998)	To evaluate a means of training special education teachers in supervisory strategies for improving specific teaching-related performance of their paraeducators.				X	X		Methodology: A multiprobe design across four groups of teachers and teacher assistants. Sample: Seven teachers trained to observe the data collection and teaching performances of their assistants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When teachers were trained to systematically observe and provide contingent feedback regarding the instructional performance of their paraeducators, the targeted teaching skills of their assistants improved.</li> <li>Improvement in other teaching skill applications also were noted.</li> </ul>
Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland (1997)	To further extend recent research by highlighting some issues observed in general education classrooms where instructional assistants supported students with disabilities.	X	X		X	X		Methodology: Qualitative using classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Sample: Data were collected in 16 classrooms in 11 public schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont.	<p>When paraeducators remained in close proximity to students with disabilities, the following was noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interference with ownership and responsibility by general educators</li> <li>Separation from classmates</li> <li>Dependence on adults</li> <li>Limitations on receiving competent instruction</li> <li>Interference with instruction of other students</li> </ul>
French (1997)	To describe the experiences of speech language pathologist (SLP) working in an education setting with speech-language assistants.	X		X		X	X	Methodology: Single-case interview study. Seven interviews were conducted throughout the study over the course of a year. Sample: One SLP and five paraeducators.	<p>Formal preparation should equip SLPs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify SLP/paraeducator roles</li> <li>Provide appropriate supervision commensurate with the abilities of the paraeducator</li> <li>Evaluate performance of paraeducators</li> </ul>

Author/Year	Purpose							Methodology	Results
		Clarifying	Planning	Directing	Monitoring	Mentoring	Evaluating		
D'Aquanni (1997)	To investigate the role of the paraeducator as it is molded by the changing educational system and the actions of those engaged in the system.	X	X			X		<p>Methodology: Ethnographic approach using observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis.</p> <p>Sample: 11 paraeducators working in grades 2-5 in four elementary schools from four districts in New York State.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job descriptions have not coincided with the evolving role of paraeducators.</li> <li>• There is an absence of clearly articulated supervisory responsibilities.</li> <li>• Time was rarely provided for on-the-job training opportunities.</li> <li>• There was an absence or lack of joint planning time for paraeducators and teachers.</li> </ul>
Prigge (1996)	To identify strategies from the perspective of teachers and special education paraeducators, which facilitate successful working relationships between general education teachers and special education paraeducators.	X	X					<p>Methodology: Survey data and interviews.</p> <p>Sample: Survey data gathered from 35 general education teachers and eight special education paraeducators assigned to those teachers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective teacher and paraeducator teaming must begin with communication regarding roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Training is needed to prepare preservice and inservice teachers to supervise special education paraeducators.</li> <li>• Collaborative planning should take place between teachers and paraeducators.</li> <li>• Paraeducators require clearly defined roles.</li> </ul>
McClain (1993)	To determine what verbal and nonverbal communications occur between a paraeducator and a teacher.	X	X	X				<p>Methodology: Ethnographic study using observations and interviews</p> <p>Sample: Three instructional teams composed of a teacher and paraeducator serving elementary students with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In all three settings, paraeducators were able to explain the teacher's expectation for their performance.</li> <li>• Teachers and paraeducators indicated ongoing communication was an important factor in their team relationships.</li> </ul>

Ashbaker, 2001). Misperception of roles complicates issues of supervision and is evident in eight of the nine studies where the need to clarify roles in both general and separate placements was emphasized (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; French, 1997; Giangreco et al., 1997; McClain, 1993; Milner, 1998; Prigge, 1996; Rose, 2000).

*Paraeducators in general education and inclusive settings.* Having more than one paraeducator on an instructional team requires an additional effort to provide clear expectations of roles and responsibilities (Chissom, 2002; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). Scholars in this area have suggested that distinct roles and management responsibilities are a vital factor in ensuring that classroom support is both unobtrusive and focused upon addressing the most pressing needs at the given time. Additionally, teachers and paraeducators were flexible as seen by their willingness to interchange instructional roles as needed. While the study conducted by Rose (2000) is a small qualitative study, it is noteworthy because it assists with clarifying the need for collaboration between teachers and paraeducators so that planning for role clarification may take place.

Conclusions or common elements of role clarification generated from a study conducted by Milner (1998) include the following: (a) general education teachers are not sure what paraeducators should be doing in their classrooms; (b) teachers and paraeducators do not have ongoing, regularly scheduled communication; (c) none of the general education teachers understood that their role was to supervise paraeducators; and (d) lack of role definition created confusion in differentiating roles for the teachers and paraeducators. An effective teacher paraeducator team begins with communication regarding roles and responsibilities (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Prigge, 1996).

A qualitative study by D'Aquanni (1997) examined the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators in several elementary schools in New York City. Eight paraeducators working in grades two through five in four elementary schools participated. Data included interviews and direct observation of the paraeducators, as well as interviews with the principals of the participating schools, the director of special education for each district, the parents of the students with special needs who were being supported by paraeducators, students within the program, and the general and special education teachers who work with these paraeducators. Findings of this study revealed that the job descriptions of paraeducators have not coincided with the evolving role of paraeducators, and revealed an absence of clearly defined supervisory responsibilities. Furthermore, D'Aquanni (1997) found an absence of joint planning time for paraeducators and teachers.

*Paraeducators in separate placements.* Giangreco and colleagues (1997) highlighted the need to clarify the roles of teacher and paraeducator teams in separate classroom settings. When paraeducators remain in close proximity to students with disabilities it often interferes with the instruction provided by the teacher. Although this study was limited to working with students with severe disabilities, it does document the need to clarify the roles of the staff so that students may receive maximum benefit in their educational settings. In a description of the experiences of a speech language pathologist (SLP) working in a school setting with paraeducators, French (1997) found a need for formal preparation to equip SLPs to clarify roles. Findings from these studies (French, 1997; Giangreco et al. 1997; McClain, 1993) support the importance of role clarification as a necessary component of paraeducator supervision.

*Planning Work Assignments*

The second supervisory function, planning, is an important but often overlooked task of teacher/paraeducator teams. In fact, teachers and paraeducators are often unsure of who is responsible for planning for the paraeducator. Planning work assignments includes providing written plans for the paraeducator to follow (Chissom, 2002; Dover, 2001; French, 1997). Pickett (1997) points out “designing instructional environments and making decisions about the goals, objectives, activities, and evaluations of instructional episodes are tasks that are well outside the paraeducator’s scope of responsibility” (p. 95). Whether planning is formal or informal, it remains the responsibility of the teacher. Six of the nine studies in Table 2.2 (Chissom, 2002; D’Aquanni, 1997; Giangreco et al., 1997; McClain, 1993; Prigge, 1996; Rose, 2000) contained elements related to the importance of planning.

*Paraeducators in general education or inclusive settings.* Rose (2000) documented teachers’ comments about the need to involve their paraeducators in lesson planning, noting that when paraeducators were working with small groups of students, “it was noticeable that in such situations, the [paraeducators] were well prepared; had a clear sense of purpose as a result of involvement in planning; and had received direction from the class teacher” (p. 194). The implication is that teachers and paraeducators actually worked as a team, because the teachers were also skilled supervisors. D’Aquanni (1997), on the other hand, found that very little planning between teachers and paraeducators actually took place. Unfortunately, this lack of planning time led to paraeducators not being able to ask questions of teachers or to expand on the skills introduced to them by

the teacher. Planning, formal or informal, does not exist, as it should between teacher and paraeducator teams (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; Prigge, 1996).

*Paraeducators in separate placements.* Planning work assignments by providing written information to acquaint paraeducators with the teacher's expectations for students led to ongoing communication, and was reported as an important factor in the teacher paraeducator team relationship (McClain, 1991). Giangreco et al.'s (1997) study documented the need for teachers to provide paraeducators with ongoing, classroom-based supervision. It also asserted that "instructional assistants should have opportunity for input into instructional planning based on their knowledge of the student, but the ultimate accountability for planning, implementing, monitoring, and adjusting instruction should rest with the professional staff" (p. 16).

#### *Directing or Delegating Tasks*

The third supervisory function for teachers working with paraeducators involves the direction and delegation of tasks. Directing or providing direct assistance is accomplished through ongoing contact to observe and assist with classroom instruction (Glickman et al., 2001), whereas delegating is the assignment of certain tasks to others to allow the leader or supervisor to focus on more critical tasks at hand. Delegation is an informal involvement tactic used by open and effective leaders (Blasé & Kirby, 2000). Teachers often delegate duties to paraeducators to give themselves more time to focus on student needs, instruction, and other work that cannot be delegated. According to Pickett (1997), delegation "must specify the outcomes, the time frame, and the level of authority, but should not demand that the paraeducator perform in exactly the same manner as the professional, nor should it demand perfection" (p. 105). Although responsible delegation



can assist paraeducators in gaining new skills and initiative, research indicates that teachers do not have the necessary preservice preparation nor are they comfortable delegating tasks to them (Cramer, 1997; French, 1997, 1998). The supervisory function directing or delegating was found in two of the nine research studies (French, 1997; McClain, 1993).

*Paraeducators in separate placements.* McClain (1993) examined observable verbal interactions between teachers and paraeducators in elementary special education classes and identified categories of interaction between them. French (1997) conducted a case study of recent speech language pathologist graduates responsible for supervising assistants in a small urban school district. Similar themes emerged from both studies, which provided compelling evidence in support of the need for formal supervision. Giving directions or delegating tasks was noted as a common occurrence for almost all participants (McClain, 1993). It is unclear why the supervisory function of directing or delegating tasks to paraeducators does not appear as a relevant element for students being served in general education or inclusive settings. The supervision of paraeducators in separate placements often involves working side by side in a classroom. In these instances tasks are explained and specific outcomes are shared (French, 1997; McClain, 1993). Certainly, the special education teacher as supervisor can provide or facilitate feedback to paraeducators for the improvement of instruction regardless of the setting. Clearly the argument could be made that the tasks of directing or delegating are equally as important for paraeducators being supervised in inclusive settings as they are for those supervised in separate placements.

### *Monitoring Performance*

Another facet of supervising paraeducators is monitoring performance.

Monitoring the quality of a paraeducator's work is a supervisory function that may come naturally to some teachers. In fact, this skill is likened to what effective teachers do in classrooms that are well managed, where teacher-managers constantly monitor what is going on so they can take preventive measures and have fewer problems or disruptions (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). Despite the positive effects, performance monitoring has been seen as adding an extra burden to a teacher's already full schedule of duties (Chissom, 2002), but it is essential to ensure that the paraeducator is performing his or her duties responsibly. Even informal assessment of paraeducator performance can be time consuming. However, the opportunity to reinforce positive behaviors through observation should not be overlooked (Blasé & Kirby, 2000). Three of the nine studies (Chissom, 2002; Giangreco et al., 1997; Jensen et al., 1998) similarly contained elements of monitoring performance in regard to the key supervisory functions of teachers working with paraeducators.

*Paraeducators in general education and inclusive settings.* A qualitative study of two middle schools found that even though monitoring was valued by paraeducators in the study and deemed essential to their performance, there were no guidelines in place to help teachers (Chissom, 2002). Consequently, the responses of both teachers and paraeducators indicated that performance monitoring in the form of informal discussions was random and not very helpful to paraprofessionals. Participants noted that informal observations were a primary means of monitoring a paraeducator's performance.

*Paraeducators in separate placements.* The utilization of paraeducators in separate placements has primarily been studied using a qualitative methodology. For example, Jensen and colleagues (1998) conducted a qualitative study in an adult education program that evaluated a means of training special education teachers in supervisory strategies for improving specific teaching-related performance of their paraeducators. The majority of students were labeled as having severe to profound mental retardation. Participating teachers received supervisory training that included both classroom-based training and training in on-the-job mentoring. They were also required to observe and provide feedback to their paraeducators on a monthly basis. Results indicated when teachers are trained to systematically observe and provide contingent feedback regarding the teaching-related performance of their paraeducators, the targeted teaching skills of their assistants improved.

Giangreco et al. (1997) also conducted a qualitative study on the effects of the proximity of paraeducators on students with multiple disabilities. The findings of this study further support the need for teachers to provide paraeducators with ongoing, classroom-based supervision. Since paraeducators in separate placements most often work alongside of teachers, observation data are probably the easiest way of monitoring the day-to-day performance of a paraeducator (Jensen et al., 1998; McClain, 1993).

#### *Mentoring and On-The-Job Training*

Finally, systematic on-the-job training and mentoring are supervisory techniques teachers working with paraeducators can use to encourage paraeducators to perform their delegated tasks to the best of their abilities. Teachers can provide on-the-job training in numerous ways, which include meeting formally or informally, modeling, providing

feedback, and coaching paraeducators through various situations. Communicating clear expectations has been linked with a method of providing consistent feedback regarding the leader's perceptions of teacher performance (Blasé & Kirby, 2000; Chissom, 2002). IDEA (1997) mandates training for paraeducators; therefore, this should be common practice for teachers who are responsible for both supervising paraeducators and providing instruction for students with special needs. This is evident in six of the nine studies reviewed (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; French, 1997; Giangreco et al., 1997; Jensen et al., 1998; Milner, 1998) and is evident in both inclusive and separate placements.

*Paraeducators in general education or inclusive settings.* D'Aquanni (1997) found that "on-the-job training was viewed by many of the paraprofessionals in this study as a successful way of providing instruction" (p. 394). Unfortunately, it was also discovered that due to the lack of planning time, paraeducators were not able to ask questions of teachers or to expand on the skills introduced to them through these training activities. This study highlights the inadequacies of on-the-job training of paraeducators when there is little supervision and no followup discussions. Other themes that emerged in the data were inadequate training of paraeducators, ineffective team practices, and inconsistent supervision.

Seven major findings emerged in the data regarding on-the-job training and mentoring related to paraeducators and their supervision in middle school classrooms (Chissom, 2002). They included the following: (a) no training is provided or paraeducators are unsure how to obtain training; (b) training takes place through inservice opportunities; (c) training is informal; (d) training consists of hands-on activities in the

classroom; (e) training consists of written information being provided to the paraeducator; (f) previous life experiences constitute training; and (g) teachers need training to effectively supervise paraeducators. Researchers note that training opportunities for both paraeducators and their supervising teachers are minimal (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 2002; Milner, 1998).

*Paraeducators in separate placements.* Giangreco and colleagues (1997) studied instructional assistants working in close proximity to students with disabilities on an ongoing basis. Results showed that paraeducators who are in close proximity to students with disabilities for prolonged periods of time often hinder peer relations as well as interaction with teachers. In addition, students with disabilities were apt to become overly dependent on the paraeducator in the classroom. In order to overcome these dependency issues, the authors noted, "instructional assistants should be provided with competency-based training that included ongoing, classroom-based supervision" (Giangreco et al., 1997, p. 16). The study found that without proper training, paraeducators could hinder rather than help student progress. When teachers were trained to systematically observe and provide contingent feedback regarding the teaching-related performance of their paraeducators, the targeted teaching skills of their assistants improved (Jensen et al., 1998). Conclusions in both Giangreco et al.'s (1997) and Jensen et al.'s (1998) studies relate closely to training as a key supervisory function and highlight the need to clarify the roles within of teacher and paraeducator teams in classroom settings.

#### *Evaluating Performance*

Research has pointed to ongoing classroom-based supervision as a critical piece of paraeducator supervision (French, 1998; Giangreco et al., 1997). This kind of

supervision is best suited for the classroom teacher, yet teachers are often unprepared and uncomfortable when asked to supervise paraeducators (French, 1998; Frith & Lindsey, 1982; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). While monitoring performance includes the informal observation of task, evaluating performance focuses on ensuring the fulfillment of job descriptions, providing constructive feedback, and issuing reprimands when needed (Dover, 2001). Pickett (1997) states “evaluation of paraeducator job performance requires judgment and should be based on fair performance standards, first-hand observations, written data, and appropriate documentation of performance” (p. 129).

One method for evaluating performance is teacher observation (Chissom, 2002; French, 2003). Two of the nine studies outlined in Table 2.2 (Chissom; 2002, French, 1997) included the importance of teachers evaluating the performance of paraeducators.

*Paraeducators in general education or inclusive settings.* Paraeducators in a district selected for participation in a qualitative study by Chissom (2002) were formally evaluated each year. The evaluation instrument consisted of four sections: (a) performance, (b) work standards, (c) human relations, and (d) professionalism. Some teachers did not completely understand the evaluation process; however, they did feel they played a role in it. With regard to evaluation, communication between the supervising teacher and the paraeducator is seen as an important link (Chissom, 2002; French, 2003; McClain, 1993; Prigge, 1996). Thus, annual evaluations did not come as a surprise to paraprofessionals when ongoing communication occurred throughout the school year.

Only one study in Table 2.2 addressed the evaluation of paraeducators in separate placements (French, 1997). This study noted an effort to provide formal preparation to

speech language pathologists should equip them to evaluate the job performance of paraeducators. The lack of research to support the evaluation of paraeducators may be due to the fact that in many instances the responsibility for the employment and evaluation of support personnel such as paraeducators remains with administrators (Pickett, 1999).

### Implications of Key Supervisory Functions

Currently, a considerable amount of literature offers qualitative analysis of the preparation, training, and duties of paraeducators (Cramer, 1997; Hoover, 1999; Mueller, 1997; Werts, 1998), but their supervision has not been given significant attention. A limited number of studies offer quantitative analysis of teachers' supervisory practices. There are a few recent studies that help clarify what teacher supervision of paraeducators should entail. To some degree, outcomes or common elements that emerged from these studies relate to the six key supervisory functions for teachers working with paraeducators. The nine studies identified in Table 2.2 were analyzed to provide a more detailed examination of the key supervisory functions of teachers working with paraeducators.

### *Inclusive Versus Separate Placements*

Five of the nine studies focused on inclusive placements (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; Milner, 1998; Prigge, 1996; Rose, 2000). Five of the six supervisory functions were present in inclusive settings. A review of the nine research studies revealed that directing or delegating tasks does not seem to be a function specific to inclusive settings. Planning and role clarifying seem to be mentioned more often in studies of inclusive placements (D'Aquanni, 1997; Giangreco et al., 1997; Prigge, 1996;

Rose, 2000), while evaluating performance was only present in one single case interview study (French, 1997). The importance of communication and collaboration between the supervising teacher and paraeducator was documented as an important link in inclusive placements (Chissom, 2002; Prigge, 1996; Rose, 2000).

Four of the nine studies focused on separate placements (French, 1997; Giangreco et al., 1997; Jensen et al., 1998; McClain, 1993). A synopsis of these studies reveals all six supervisory functions to be present. Directing or delegating tasks as well as performance monitoring seem to be more noteworthy in separate placements (French, 1997; Jensen et al., 1998; McClain, 1993). Since paraeducators in separate placements most often work alongside teachers, monitoring the daily performance of paraeducators may be easier in these settings than for teachers supervising paraeducators serving students in inclusive settings (Jensen et al., 1998; McClain, 1993).

The six supervisory tasks discussed in this section are not discrete functions. Because research in the area of paraeducator supervision is just emerging, there is some overlap in the meanings of supervisory tasks. Researchers attempting to explore the supervisory tasks identified as a part of this study have identified similar characteristics that are closely related and contain some overlap of content. Consequently, these supervisory functions can not be identified as completely separate from one another. Research supports the inclusion of tasks such as role clarifying (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; French, 1997; Giangreco et al., 1997; McClain, 1993; Milner, 1998), planning (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; Giangreco et al., 1997), and training (D'Aquanni, 1997; French, 1997) as specific skills needed in the instructional management of paraeducators.



### Preparation of Teachers and Paraeducators

This section reviews the status of professional preparation for both teachers and paraeducators. Effective preparation programs can lead to the effective instructional management of paraeducators. Challenges in paraeducator supervision such as negative perceptions of supervision (Dover, 2002; French, 1997) and lack of clarity between teachers and paraeducators (Chissom, 2002; French, 1997; Milner, 1998) can be alleviated by the systematic use of effective training programs (Pickett, 1995; Steckelberg & Vasa, 1988). A description of preparation programs that equip administrators and teachers to work with paraeducators is included.

#### *Teacher Preparation*

The role of the special education teacher has changed from that of a soloist to a conductor as teachers plan for and supervise paraeducators. The ability of paraeducators to meet the needs of students with disabilities is affected by the ability of teachers to carry out this newly developed responsibility (French, 2003). This means that teachers need skills in making daily assignments and scheduling activities, designing instruction for another adult to carry out, monitoring student progress and making instructional decisions, providing corrective feedback to paraeducators, developing and documenting on-the-job training, and evaluating paraeducators' performance (Steckelberg & Vasa, 1988). In the past, little was done to prepare teachers to work with and supervise paraeducators. In 1982, only 14% of the special education teachers who participated in a study conducted by Vasa, Steckelberg and Ulrich-Ronning received training on supervising paraeducators, yet 82% felt that such training was necessary.

Placed in a position of having to supervise another adult, teachers are encountering new problems around issues of authority, role confusion, and personality conflicts. Milner (1998) recommends that teachers learn how to plan ahead to assign tasks to the paraeducator, welcome a mutual exchange of ideas, provide adequate training and supervision, use paraeducators' talents and skills, incorporate employment guidelines, and promote mutual respect and caring. Dover (2001) writes that teachers need to develop skills and recommends they focus on becoming an effective instructor of adult partners, developing interdisciplinary teaming skills, and developing an awareness of appropriate paraeducator-professional roles.

Reetz (1987) developed a self-evaluation tool teachers can use to help them determine their effectiveness in promoting a productive and comfortable working climate for paraeducators. The author recommends that administrators provide joint planning time so teachers and paraeducators can participate in the evaluation together as a means of helping teachers design activities to enhance the paraeducators' effectiveness rather than blaming them for their lack of expertise.

More recently, institutions of higher education are starting to acknowledge teacher preparation in paraeducator supervision as an area of need. Several training manuals are now available for teachers and administrators who are responsible for supervising, training, and evaluating paraeducators. Table 2.3 provides a list of training programs. These manuals emphasize the need for administrators and teachers at the district and building levels to collaborate in their efforts to effectively integrate paraeducators into classrooms. The manuals for administrators highlight the following as critical components that should be addressed:

- Developing clearly defined job descriptions;
- Identifying distinctions to the roles and duties of teachers and paraeducators;
- Providing systematic training for paraeducators using preservice, inservice, and supervised on-the-job training;
- Pursuing opportunities for career advancement with institutions of higher education;
- Providing training for teachers to strengthen supervisory and management skills; and
- Enhancing administrators' capacity to assist teacher and paraeducators to work as effective teams.

The general areas covered in the manuals developed to assist teachers in working with paraeducators focus on the following:

- Determining the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators and teachers;
- Assisting in the development of a well-written job description;
- Developing a plan for integrating the paraeducator into the program utilizing weekly planning meetings to provide feedback and guidance to the paraeducator;
- Evaluating paraeducators using informal techniques; and
- Understanding legal and ethical issues in regard to assigning responsibilities.

#### *Paraeducator Preparation*

Paraeducators are often utilized in schools to aid with direct student instruction and assist with the delivery of instruction for children and youth with disabilities.

Although they are hired to work directly with the most challenging students, they often come unprepared for the task. It has become increasingly popular in schools to assign a

Table 2.3

*Resources and Programs Preparing Administrators and Teachers to Work with Paraeducators*

Author	Date	Title
<b>Administrators</b>		
Vasa, Steckelberg, & Hoffman	1986	Resource Guide for the Development of Policies and Practices in the Use of Paraprofessionals in Special Education
Pickett	1988	The Employment and Training of Paraprofessional Personnel: A Technical Assistance Manual for Administrators and Staff Developers
National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Special Education and Related Human Service	1988	A Comprehensive Program of Technical Assistance to Prepare Administrators and Staff Developers to Improve the Performance and training of Paraprofessionals
<b>Teachers</b>		
Vasa & Steckelberg	1987	What Teachers Need to Know About Using Paraprofessionals
Steckelberg & Vasa	1988	Preservice and Inservice Training Program to Prepare Teachers to Supervised and Work More Effectively with Paraprofessional Personnel
Vasa, Steckelberg, & Sundermeier	1989	Supervision Strategies for Special Educators in Working with Instructional Paraprofessionals
Pickett	1997	A Training Program to Prepare Teachers to Supervise and Work Effectively with Paraprofessional Personnel

paraeducator to work one-on-one with a student or to work with groups of students with significant disabilities. This kind of assignment almost always occurs with no previous preparation and no ongoing supervision (Frank et al., 1988; French, 1997; Hoover, 1999). Often no prerequisite skills are required for paraeducators, and training opportunities are limited (Pickett, 1997). In addition, supervising teachers are not prepared to adequately supervise paraeducators in school settings (French, 1998; Frith & Lindsey, 1982; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

What constitutes an appropriate level of training to be an effective paraeducator has been a topic of national debate (Giangreco et al., 1998). Undoubtedly, there is widespread consensus that some level of training and orientation is required to be an effective paraeducator. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) offers clarity about what it takes to be a “highly qualified” paraeducator.

In a 1988 study, Frank and colleagues used survey data to identify the tasks that special education teachers rate as important for their paraeducators to be able to complete. Participating teachers were also asked to rate their paraeducators’ skills in completing tasks rated as important. In addition, the study examined the effects the instructional model and the age of students served had on the ratings. Approximately one third of all special education teachers in Iowa who were assigned paraeducators for that school year participated in the study.

Results indicated that, overall, special education teachers were satisfied with the performance of their paraeducators. The most common statements obtained from the survey were related to the importance of inservice training for paraeducators. Specifically, the need for preparation surrounding the management of student behavior was cited most frequently. Findings also identified the need for formal college training programs for paraeducators. The authors (1988) recommended that paraeducators have differing competencies depending on the type of educational setting in which they are employed.

#### Professional and Paraeducator Responsibilities

Although many practitioners have noted and continue to note the need for appropriate training for paraeducators (Frith et al., 1982; Giangreco et al., 1997; Marks et

al., 1999; Mueller, 1997; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), there are differing ideas regarding responsibilities for both teachers and paraeducators. In 1982, Escudero and Sears conducted a study in an effort to “provide information that would reduce the ambiguity between the responsibilities and skills needed by teachers and teacher aides for the severely/profoundly handicapped” (p. 190). Seventy-two teachers and 65 paraeducators participated in this investigation of the perceptions of both groups in an effort to assist with role clarification. A 70-item questionnaire was disseminated that assessed 12 categories: (a) administration; (b) interdisciplinary professional relationships; (c) utilization of local, state, and national resources; (d) training others; (e) parent relationships; (f) student assessment; (g) curriculum development; (h) curriculum areas; (i) teaching procedures; (j) behavioral approach to teaching; (k) child development; and (l) adaptive aids and associated medical/health considerations. Each group was asked to select whether a particular responsibility was exclusively or primarily the role of the teacher.

Results indicated that the roles of teachers, especially those instructing students with disabilities, included many tasks other than simply direct student instruction. Escudero and Sears (1982) reported “the teacher for [students with severe and profound disabilities] appeared to be perceived as more of an instructional manager or coordinator of instructional activities than as a person who just provides direct instruction” (p. 193). Results also indicated that paraeducators are often responsible for direct student instruction. Escudero and Sears point out that training should “prepare teacher aides for the responsibilities they will be sharing with teachers” (p. 194). In other words, both

teachers and paraeducators who work with students with disabilities need training to prepare them for their specific roles in the classroom.

Frank et al., (1988) expanded on Escudero's and Sears' (1982) study by identifying tasks that special education teachers in Iowa rated as important for their paraeducators to be able to complete. Both teachers and paraeducators were given similar questionnaires. As mentioned, the data identified those tasks that special education teachers rate as important for their paraeducators to be able to complete. In addition, teachers were asked to rate their paraeducators' skill in completing tasks rated as important and the effects of the program instructional model and age of students served had on ratings also were examined. The results indicated that teachers were generally satisfied with the performance of their paraeducators. The most frequent statements in the open-ended responses concerned inservice training for paraeducators. From a sample of 325 participants, 25 (.08%) teachers and seven (.02 %) paraeducators indicated that more preparation was needed, with behavior management being cited most often (Frank et al., 1988). Closely related to these recommendations were comments about the need for formal college training for paraeducators. The findings also indicated that paraeducators should have different competencies, depending on their particular job description and assignment. Unlike Escudero's study, this investigation differs by highlighting specific paraeducator issues that need to be addressed.

There is some agreement about professional and paraeducator responsibilities. The roles of special education teachers include many tasks such as planning for students, writing individualized education programs, and delegating tasks to paraeducators. As extensions of teachers, paraeducators are regularly responsible for the direct instruction

of students. In an effort to arrange for teachers and paraeducators to carry out their roles and responsibilities, appropriate training and professional development are necessary.

### Conclusion

The research literature reviewed in this chapter provides a description of paraeducators, including their history, training, and efficacy. In the 1990s, research on paraeducators expanded into their roles in inclusive settings, instructional management, and supervision. Efforts have been made to identify factors that contribute to effective paraeducator supervision, but the major body of research provides primarily goal statements, opinions, and suggestions for best practices. Although each of the studies reviewed in this chapter states the importance of one or more of the six domains in Pickett's supervisory framework, only one qualitative study to date (Chissom, 2002) has explored how five of the these six domains are implemented and carried out in school settings.

The present study examined Guiding Principle #7, which explored all six domains of the special education teachers' supervision of paraeducators. A quantitative design was employed in order to examine the extent to which special education teachers supervise paraeducators in classrooms in one local school district in southeastern Virginia.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the supervisory practices of special education teachers who work with paraeducators in inclusive settings?
2. What are the perceptions of special education teachers regarding their preparation to supervise paraeducators?



3. To what extent do special education teachers engage in the following supervisory functions: (a) planning work assignments, (b) directing or delegating tasks, (c) clarifying roles, (d) monitoring performance, (e) evaluating performance, and (f) training and mentoring paraeducators?
4. What is the relationship between special education teachers' supervisory practices and specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators?

In response to the growing numbers of paraeducators in school settings today and the limited amount of research regarding their supervision, it is expected that this research will contribute to the body of knowledge that addresses supervising practices of support personnel. Additionally, results of this study are expected have an impact on staff development personnel, teachers who provide instructional supervision to paraeducators, and the paraeducators themselves. The research base needs to be broadened as the numbers of paraeducators continues to grow and teachers' roles continue to evolve to include supervision.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

This chapter describes the research methods used in this study. The first section provides a brief overview of the study. The second section addresses the methods used in the development of the survey instrument. The third section is divided into four descriptive sections: (a) population and sample, (b) survey instrument, (c) data collection, and (d) data analysis. The chapter ends with a discussion of ethical safeguards.

### Overview of Study

The problem of paraeducator supervision arises because teachers often feel they are not prepared to supervise them in school settings (French, 1998; Frith & Lindsey, 1982; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Additionally, how paraeducators are utilized to provide instructional services to students with disabilities has an impact on the amount of management required (Dover, 2001; Prigge, 1996).

This study examined the perceptions of special education teachers and their supervisory practices regarding their work with paraeducators in relation to specific supervisory functions derived in part from Pickett's (1999) framework. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the supervisory practices of special education teachers who work with paraeducators in inclusive settings?

2. What are the perceptions of special education teachers regarding their preparation to supervise paraeducators?
3. To what extent do special education teachers engage in the following supervisory functions: (a) planning work assignments, (b) directing or delegating tasks, (c) clarifying roles, (d) monitoring performance, (e) evaluating performance, and (f) training and mentoring paraeducators?
4. What is the relationship between special education teachers' supervisory practices and specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators?

### Research Methodology

Consistent with the underlying research problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions, a parallel form of mixed methodology was employed in executing the study. Parallel form involves collecting of both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). A survey was selected as a means for collecting data regarding the perceptions of special education teachers working with and supervising paraeducators because most existing studies in the field are small qualitative studies. The use of surveys as a systematic means of data collection has a long history and has been regarded as a valuable research tool in education (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Surveys were chosen over other forms of data collection, such as interview and observation, because the nature of the responses will be categorical, and the study population will be able to read, understand, and respond to written prompts.

### Population and Sample

Special education teachers in one school district in southeast Virginia who had experience working with and supervising paraeducators in inclusive settings served as the

population for this study. This particular school district has made systematic efforts toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings. This small school district serves over 12,000 students; of this number 1,137 students had been identified with special needs. At the time of data collection, 80 special education teachers were employed in this district. A total of 96 paraeducators were employed to assist these teachers with the provision of services to students with disabilities (S. Creasey, personal communication, October 24, 2003).

Due to the size of the population, the study sought to include the entire study population. Thus, 80 special education teachers were invited to participate. A response rate of 50% was considered satisfactory for the purposes of analysis and reporting of findings (Rea & Parker, 1997). A response rate of 50% ( $N=40$ ) was sought, which yielded sufficient respondents for data analysis. The supervisor of student services in the district agreed to have office staff members apply labels containing names and work locations of participants to the surveys to be disseminated. The supervisor of student services assured the researcher that survey instruments would be sent to all special education teachers employed in the school district.

#### Generalizability

While federal legislation calls for the supervision of paraeducators (IDEA, 1997; NCLB, 2001), states are given latitude in how they interpret those directives in formulating individual state regulations. Yet more flexibility has been given to local school districts in defining the requirement for supervision. The results of the study are generalizable to public schools with similar demographics who also serve the majority of special needs students in inclusive settings. Generalizability is also enhanced when the

school district's teaching workforce demographics are similar to participants in this study.

### Survey Instrument

A review of the special education literature, informal communication with scholars who write in the field of paraeducator preparation and supervision, and interviews with Virginia state department personnel revealed critical issues relating to special education paraeducators and the special education teachers who supervise them. A structured survey (see Appendix B) containing items determined to be relevant to these issues was developed by the researcher for the purpose of collecting data regarding the supervisory practices and perceptions of special education teachers. Additionally, items drawn from similar instruments developed by Vasa, Steckelberg, and Ulrich-Ronning (1982), Dover (2001), and French (2001) were included in the instrument. Using an adaptation of Pickett's (1999) framework supported by supervisory skills defined and discussed in the existing literature and the researcher's experience as a former paraeducator and certified special education teacher, six discrete tasks were identified for examination.

The instrument was divided into four sections. Part I asked participants to respond to demographic data. Part II asked for responses related to general supervisory skills. Part III, a Likert scale, asked participants to respond to statements describing supervisory behaviors. The Likert scale portion of the instrument included a minimum of five items to measure each construct as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). Reasons for using multi-items have been discussed by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). Individual items have considerable random measurement error and are unreliable. Such items also lack

scope, so it is not likely that a single item can fully represent an intricate theoretical concept or any specific attribute. When several items are used, the consistency of responding produced by an attitude can be detected (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The final portion of the survey (Part IV) was open-ended, asking participants to respond to questions about the rewards and challenges of supervising paraeducators.

Standards of content validity were established with the use of a survey instrument that solicited participant perceptions about the supervision of paraeducators. The researcher assumed that all respondents shared the same understanding of the topic. Validity was also established with a process of determining whether respondents indicated their true opinion on more than one measure of the same construct (Gall et al., 1996). The triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative data provided verification of the special education teachers' perceptions regarding their supervision of paraeducators.

#### *Pretesting the Instrument*

For validity purposes an expert panel composed of teachers, administrators, and paraeducators was convened. Six persons (three special education teachers, two assistant principals, and one special education coordinator) were provided with copies of the research questions and survey instrument, and asked to assess the survey for such critical factors as clarity, comprehensiveness, and ease of responsiveness. Panelists' feedback was recorded on a feedback form (see Appendix C) and used to revise the survey instrument.

A field test is a small-scale study conducted prior to the actual study. For the present investigation, representatives of the target group were asked to review the survey instrument and provide feedback on it. Thus, draft of the instrument was sent to 10

special education teachers working in inclusive settings who had previous teaching experience, which included the supervision of paraeducators. The special education teachers were also sent a feedback form (see Appendix D) and a cover letter. Finally, participants received a teabag as a minimal incentive for their participation.

The suggested changes gathered from the expert panel and field test participants were used to make minimal revisions to the survey instrument. Additional suggestions for revision were received from the assistant superintendent and the supervisor of student services prior to approval. The items were modified to yield more accurate responses from participants. The instrument was also reviewed by members of the researcher's dissertation committee prior to disseminating it to participants.

#### Data Collection

Special education teachers in a local school district were requested to participate on a voluntary basis. No names were attached to the surveys. Consent forms required their consent to be a part of the study (see Appendix E). All surveys and consent forms were returned in separate sealed envelopes to a post office box and opened only by the researcher. The surveys were treated in a confidential manner as evidenced in the administration and collection of the survey through the following methods: (a) no place for individual names of survey respondents was provided on the survey; (b) the special educator's name did not appear on the outside of envelopes and could not be used in any way during the analysis of the surveys; and (c) consent forms and survey instruments were stored separately.

To increase the survey return rate, the following actions were taken:

1. The cover letter was printed on letterhead from The College of William & Mary and included the researcher's signature in blue ink (see Appendix F).
2. Labels showing the survey's due date were placed on the outside of each envelope.
3. A return address was included with the survey. In the event a survey participant misplaced the return envelope, the survey could be sent to the researcher for analysis.
4. Teabags were included in each packet as a token of appreciation to the special education teachers.
5. Participants completing and returning surveys within two weeks were entered in a drawing for a \$50.00 gift certificate to the Teacher and Parents Store (TAPS). Participants returned a self-addressed post-card (Appendix G) to notify the researcher of their desire to be included in the drawing. This was the only use for participant's names in the study.
6. Postcard reminders of the survey due date (see Appendix H) were sent to each participant two weeks prior to the due date. At this time participants were given the option of receiving another copy of the survey via e-mail attachment for completion.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis involved various statistical procedures to answer the study questions. Table 3.1 lists the research questions and the analysis for each. Both nominal and ordinal data were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Survey data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Numerical codes were used to enter data



for analysis. A list of these codes can be found in Appendix I. Frequency tables as well as cross-tabulations and contingency tables were generated to answer the research questions.

Table 3.1

*Data Analysis*

	Survey Instrument Item(s)	Statistical Analysis
General Descriptive Measures	1-11	Frequencies
Research Question		
1. What are the supervisory practices of special education teachers who work with paraeducators in inclusive settings?	Evaluation specific: 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21	Frequency (percentage)
2. What are the perceptions of special education teachers regarding their preparation to supervise paraeducators?	13 Open-ended questions 52, 53	Frequency (percentage) analytic inductive codes & themes
3. To what extent do the special education teachers engage in the following supervisory functions: (a) planning work assignments, (b) directing or delegating tasks, (c) clarifying roles, (d) monitoring performance, (e) evaluating performance, and (f) training and mentoring paraeducators?	Likert scale: 22-51	Frequency (percentage)  By school setting years working with paraeducators
4. What is the relationship between the special education teachers' supervisory practices and specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators?	12 Likert scale: 22-51	Frequency (percentage, mean, standard deviation)

*Statistical Analysis*

A frequency distribution is a summary listing of the number of times certain events take place within each category of a variable (George & Mallery, 2001; Rea & Parker, 1997). Frequency distributions involve a description of one variable and are reported in percentages, means, and standard deviations.

*Research question 1.* Participant responses regarding the supervisory practices of special education teachers who work with paraeducators in inclusive settings were analyzed using frequency statistics and reported in a percentage format.

*Research question 2.* Participant responses regarding the perceptions of special education teachers concerning their preparation to supervise paraeducators were analyzed using frequency statistics and reported in a percentage format.

*Research question 3.* A percentage of participants for each of the six supervisory functions were analyzed by school setting and years working with paraeducators. Frequency statistics were reported using percentages, means, and standard deviations.

*Research question 4.* To determine the relationship between the special education teachers' supervisory practices and specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators, descriptive statistics were employed using SPSS for Windows. Mean scores and standard deviations were reported.

#### *Open-Ended Analysis*

Open-ended questions have no preexisting response categories and thereby permit the respondent to answer in his or her own words (Rea & Parker, 1997). The researcher analyzed participants' responses using an analytic inductive method. First, all responses were transcribed, then a set of codes in which the responses could be grouped were developed. Responses were then sorted and sifted into categories in an effort to identify phrases, patterns, and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Upon final analysis, responses were reported by category, providing sample responses.

### Ethical Safeguards

Written approval for the study was sought and garnered from the participating school district. In order to obtain permission to conduct the research study with special education teachers in this school district, a letter was sent to the appropriate central office administrator (see Appendix J). The researcher met with the supervisor of student services who serves as the administrator in charge of special education for the school district to discuss the project and seek informal approval prior to sending a letter to central office personnel.

The study was conducted in a manner that protected the anonymity of the school district and study participants. Informed consent focused on ensuring that research participants entered the research of their free will and with understanding of the nature and scope of the study, and any possible obligations that may arise (Gall et al., 1996). The researcher assigned codes by placing a number on each questionnaire prior to the mechanical scoring. The codebook and survey instruments were always in the possession of the researcher or secured in a locked area. The study involved no interventions, treatments, or manipulations of participants. In accordance with ethical principles established for research studies, the research study was submitted to the Human Subjects Review Committee at The College of William & Mary for approval. Once approved, the study was conducted in keeping with acceptable, ethical research practices.

### Conclusion

Results of this study have training implications for administrators, staff development personnel, teachers who provide instructional supervision to paraeducators, and paraeducators themselves. In response to the growing numbers of paraeducators in

school settings today and the limited amount of research regarding their supervision, this research makes a contribution to the knowledge base informing current practices in supervision of paraeducators and other support personnel.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Analysis of the Results

Special education teachers were surveyed about their practices and perceptions regarding the supervision of paraeducators in inclusive settings. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered using a survey instrument. The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the returned surveys. The chapter begins with background information about the questionnaire development, then the findings are reported as a description of the survey population, along with answers to the study's research questions.

### Instrument Development

A review of the special education professional literature, informal communication with scholars who write on paraeducator preparation and supervision, and interviews with Virginia state department personnel revealed critical issues relating to special education paraeducators and the special education teachers who supervise them. A structured survey (see Appendix B) containing items relevant to these issues was developed by the researcher for the purpose of collecting data regarding the practices and perceptions of special education teachers. Additionally, a few items drawn from similar instruments developed by Vasa, Steckelberg, and Ulrich-Ronning (1982), Dover (2001), and French (2001) were included as a part of the instrument. Using an adaptation of Pickett's (1999) framework supported by key supervisory skills defined and discussed in the existing

literature and through the researcher's professional experience, six supervisory tasks were identified for examination.

The survey instrument was divided into four sections. Part I asked participants to provide demographic data. Part II solicited responses related to general supervisory skills. Part III was a Likert scale asking participants to respond to statements describing supervisory behaviors. The Likert scale portion of the instrument included a minimum of five items to measure each construct as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). The final portion of the survey (Part IV) consisted of two open-ended questions and asked participants to write in responses to each. The survey instruments were analyzed and scored, yielding primarily quantitative results with additional qualitative findings.

#### *Internal Consistency Reliability*

SPSS was used to run a reliability analysis on Likert-scale items. This analysis was run to determine internal consistency. The reliability of the scales and their individual items was empirically examined through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which quantifies the relationship between a specific group of measurement items and the underlying concept that the grouping of items is intended to measure. Cronbach's alpha provides information about the reliability of any given set of measures. Since alpha is interpreted as a correlation coefficient, it ranges in values from 0.00 to 1.00. Generally, scales that obtain alpha levels of 0.70 or greater are considered to be reliable. The closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0, the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale (George & Mallery, 2003).

Table 4.1 provides alpha scores and descriptive statistics for the six supervisory tasks. The reliability coefficient was equal to five items for each supervisory task. The

alpha score for evaluating performance (.8497) signifies good internal reliability. Alpha scores for the two supervisory tasks of planning work assignments (.7350) and clarifying roles (.7452) represent responses that had acceptable internal reliability. Internal reliability scores for the two supervisory tasks of directing or delegating (.6078) and mentoring and on-the-job training (.6485) were questionable. The lowest alpha scores of .5260 in the area of monitoring performance indicated poor internal consistency between respondents.

Table 4.1

*Reliability Analysis*

Supervisory Tasks	Alpha	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Planning Work Assignments	.7350	18.67	3.80	5
Directing or Delegating Tasks	.6078	18.90	3.17	5
Clarifying Roles	.7452	20.10	3.50	5
Monitoring Performance	.5260	17.89	3.11	5
Evaluating Performance	.8497	14.84	5.47	5
Mentoring and Training	.6485	14.08	3.23	5

The alpha score of the monitoring performance index was lower than other indexes, therefore, further examination took place. The reliability analysis was repeated to determine what the alpha scores might be if one of the five items within the index were deleted. Results of this additional analysis indicated that the alpha score for monitoring performance would increase if two items were deleted. These items were: "I correct inaccurate instruction by the paraeducator" and "I provide regular performance feedback to the paraeducator." Mean scores for these two items were also lower.

The survey instrument performed well in three of six supervisory tasks for the reliability analysis. It is important to note that alpha could have been increased in the supervisory tasks monitoring performance by removing two items. However, for the

purposes of this study, the complete five-item scale for the six supervisory tasks was retained.

#### Return Rate

The study sought responses from special education teachers. A total of 80 surveys were distributed to participants in a local school district. A total of 49 surveys were returned, for an overall response rate of 61% ( $n = 49$ ). Of these, all returned surveys were usable. However, in three cases, individual questionnaires were missing responses to a few items. Arithmetic means were calculated in an attempt to replace the missing data. The arithmetic mean represents the average score for participants. The arithmetic mean was found by adding the numbers in the set of data and dividing by the number of respondents. Arithmetic means were entered in place of the missing data, and the analysis continued.

#### Description of Survey Population

Data from the 49 surveys were used to answer the study's research questions. Survey items 1 through 11 gathered data about general descriptive measures of demographic variables such as (a) years of teaching, (b) level of education, (c) school setting, (d) number of years supervising paraeducators, (e) number of paraeducators supervised, and (f) specific preservice or inservice preparation for working with paraeducators. Responses indicated that 94% ( $n = 46$ ) of participants were female and 6% ( $n = 3$ ) were male. Frequency distributions and percentages were computed for all demographic data. All percentages reported were rounded to the nearest whole number.



*Number of Years of Teaching Experience*

Of the 49 respondents, about 33% ( $n = 16$ ) indicated they had completed between 11 to 25 years of teaching, 31% ( $n = 15$ ) indicated completing between one to five years of teaching, 27% ( $n = 13$ ) indicated completing between six to 10 years of teaching, and 8% ( $n = 4$ ) indicated completing over 25 years of teaching. Table 4.2 outlines frequencies and percentages of respondents. Responses of participants regarding years of teaching experience does not count the partial year in which study was conducted.

Table 4.2

*Number of Years of Teaching Experience*

	<i>N</i>	%
1st year	1	2
1-5 years	15	31
6-10 years	13	27
11-25 years	16	33
Over 25 years	4	8
Total	49	100

*Educational Level and Primary Position*

Participants were asked to provide the highest degree held at the time of completing the survey instrument. Sixty-three percent ( $n = 27$ ) reported holding master's degrees and 37% ( $n = 16$ ) reported holding bachelor's degrees. No respondents reported holding a doctoral degree. Participants also responded to a question asking them to indicate the position in which they spend the largest portion of their day. Of the 49 respondents, 59% ( $n = 29$ ) indicated the position in which they spent the largest portion of their day was as an inclusive support teacher, 20% ( $n = 10$ ) reported spending the largest portion of their day as a pull-out support teacher, 12% ( $n = 6$ ) indicated "other,"

noting their time was split between inclusive support and pull-out support teaching positions, and 8% ( $n = 4$ ) chose not to respond to this item.

#### *School Setting and Student Need Level*

In an effort to determine the current work setting in which participants worked, respondents were asked to select elementary, middle, or high school. Survey instruments directed teachers to respond to all that applied. Respondents self-reported 53% ( $n = 26$ ) taught in elementary school settings, 25% ( $n = 12$ ) taught in middle school settings and, 22% ( $n = 11$ ) taught in high school settings. To determine the various need level of the students whom participants were teaching, participants responded to one of two choices, mild/moderate needs or severe/profound needs. Responses to this question yielded 93% ( $n = 40$ ) of participants reporting they served students with mild/moderate needs, while 7% ( $n = 3$ ) of participants reported serving students with severe/profound needs.

#### *Number of Years Supervising Paraeducators*

Respondents reported their years of experience regarding the supervision of paraeducators. Fifty-four percent ( $n = 26$ ) reported having 1-5 years of experience supervising paraeducators, 25% ( $n = 12$ ) reported between 6-10 years' experience supervising paraeducators, 18% ( $n = 9$ ) reported having between 11-25 years' experience supervising paraeducators, while 4% ( $n = 2$ ) reported having more than 25 years of experience supervising paraeducators. Table 4.3 outlines frequencies and percentages of participant responses.

Table 4.3

#### *Number of Years Supervising Paraeducators*

	<i>N</i>	%
1-5 years	26	53
6-10 years	12	25
11-25 years	9	18
More than 25 years	2	4
Total	49	100

*Number of Paraeducators Supervised and Licensure*

Of the 49 respondents, 42% ( $n = 20$ ) reported currently supervising two paraeducators, 38% ( $n = 18$ ) reported currently supervising one paraeducator, 10% ( $n = 5$ ) reported supervising three paraeducators, 6% ( $n = 3$ ) reported supervising four paraeducators, and 4% ( $n = 2$ ) reported supervising five or more paraeducators.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the type of certification held at the time of completing the survey instrument. Of the 49 respondents 80% ( $n = 39$ ) reported being fully licensed in the area they currently teach, 12% ( $n = 6$ ) indicated they held a provisional teaching license, 8% ( $n = 4$ ) reported being fully licensed, but teaching out of the area of their certification.

*Research Questions*

The research questions addressed by this study were:

1. What are the supervisory practices of special education teachers who work with paraeducators in inclusive settings?
2. What are the perceptions of special education teachers regarding their preparation to supervise paraeducators?
3. To what extent do special education teachers engage in the following supervisory functions: (a) planning work assignments, (b) directing or delegating tasks, (c) clarifying roles, (d) monitoring performance, (e) evaluating performance, and (f) training paraeducators?
4. What is the relationship between the special education teachers' supervisory practices and specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators?

4. What is the relationship between the special education teachers' supervisory practices and specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators?

#### Research Question 1

Responses to the first research question were found by analyzing data from items 14-21 of the survey instrument. The first survey item leading to an answer to this question asked whether or not paraeducators received formal evaluations. Of 49 respondents, 90% ( $n = 44$ ) indicated "yes" paraeducators do receive formal evaluations, while 10% ( $n = 5$ ) indicated "no" as responses. The next survey item asked participants to report how frequently paraeducators were evaluated. Participants were given the option of responding to one of four choices (not evaluated, annually, every two years, or other). Three-fourths of the respondents, specifically 78% ( $n = 38$ ) reported that paraeducators are evaluated annually. Six percent ( $n = 3$ ) selected "other" as a response and chose to write in "don't know." Another 16% ( $n = 8$ ) chose not to answer this question.

The next survey item asked about what tool was used to evaluate paraeducators. Special education teachers were given the opportunity to select more than one response as answers applied to them. Table 4.4 presents frequencies and percentages. As illustrated, the 49 respondents, 55% ( $n = 22$ ) selected rating scales as the primary tool used to evaluate paraeducators while 47% ( $n = 23$ ) indicated observation as the tool used to evaluate paraeducators. Responses to options such as checklist and narratives were split at 35% ( $n = 17$ ) and 33% ( $n = 16$ ), respectively. Self-evaluations as an evaluation tool was selected by 4% ( $n = 2$ ) of the respondents.

When the special education teachers were asked on the survey, Who holds ultimate responsibility for the formal evaluation of paraeducators? 47% ( $n = 23$ ) indicated the principal held ultimate responsibility, while 27% ( $n = 13$ ) indicated that the special education administrator or supervisor held ultimate responsibility for evaluating the paraeducator. Interestingly, only 8% ( $n = 4$ ) of special education teachers reported that they were the person who had ultimate responsibility.

Table 4.4

*Paraeducator Evaluation Tools*

		<i>N</i>	%
Checklist	Yes	17	35
	No	23	47
Observation	Yes	23	47
	No	17	35
Rating Scale	Yes	22	55
	No	13	27
Narrative Evaluation	Yes	16	33
	No	25	51
Self-evaluation	Yes	2	4
	No	39	80

Participants were then asked to indicate the extent to which the year-end evaluation of paraeducators is based on the paraeducator's job description. Of the 49 respondents, 45% ( $n = 22$ ) reported that they did not know, 39% ( $n = 19$ ) reported to "a great extent," 10% ( $n = 5$ ) reported "partially", while 2% ( $n = 1$ ) reported a "minimal extent."

Special education teachers were asked to rate the amount of supervision they provided. Of the 49 respondents, 92% ( $n = 45$ ) indicated frequent contact and 8% ( $n = 4$ ) indicated some contact. The next survey item asked respondents to report how often face-to-face meetings were held with the paraeducator. Of the 49 participants, 60% ( $n = 29$ )

reported holding face-to-face meetings daily, 14% ( $n = 7$ ) reported holding meetings monthly, and 12% ( $n = 6$ ) reported holding meetings weekly. Respondents were asked to further indicate the length of formal face-to-face meetings with paraeducators. Sixty percent ( $n = 29$ ) selected the option of meeting less than 15 minutes with the paraeducators they supervise, while 27% ( $n = 13$ ) indicated meeting between 15-30 minutes. A small number of participants 10% ( $n = 5$ ) indicated meeting more than 30 minutes with paraeducators.

Results of the analysis for the first research question revealed the following supervisory practices for special education teachers working with paraeducators. Participants in this study had knowledge of the fact that paraeducators receive formal evaluations, but did not know whether year-end evaluations for paraeducators are based on their job descriptions. While paraeducators did receive formal evaluations, it was typically the principal or special education administrator who held ultimate responsibility for evaluating these personnel. Participants reported that the primary evaluation tools were to rating scales and observations. The majority of teacher respondents reported having face-to-face meetings on a daily basis; however, the length of most of these meetings was reported as being less than 15 minutes.

#### Research Question 2

Responses to the second research question about the perceptions of special education teachers regarding their preparation to supervise paraeducators were found by analyzing data from survey item number 13 and completing a qualitative analysis of two open-ended survey items, 52 and 53. About three-fourths of special education teachers, 78% ( $n = 38$ ), selected real-life experience as what contributed to their knowledge and

ability to supervise paraeducators. While inservices, college courses, and conference sessions were reported as not contributing to their knowledge and ability to supervise, responses regarding assistance from the principal or administrator were divided between none 43% (n = 21) and some 45% (n = 22).

### *Qualitative Analysis and Emerging Themes*

The open-ended questions had no preexisting response categories and, thus, permitted the respondent to answer in his or her own words (Rea & Parker, 1997). The researcher reviewed participants' responses using an analytic inductive method for analysis of data. First, all responses were transcribed into a Word document, which arranged data for summarization and packaging. Then a set of codes in which the responses could be grouped were created. Responses were then sorted and sifted into categories in an effort to identify phrases, patterns, and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Upon final analysis, responses were reported by category providing sample responses.

Five a priori codes or categories for challenges of supervising paraeducators were set based upon questions found in the research and professional experience. The five codes were (a) time, (b) teamwork, (c) training, (d) perception of leadership, and (e) delegate. Next, data were aggregated to identify trends and themes in the data set. This was done in an effort to search for relationships in the data while finding out where the emphasis and gaps in the data were. Delegate was dropped as a code during this level of analysis because it emerged as more appropriately belonging to the code perception of leadership. This level of analysis merged some of the codes into the following four

remaining categories (a) time, (b) teamwork, (c) training, and (d) perception of leadership.

Four a priori codes or categories for rewards of supervising paraeducators were set again based upon questions in the literature and professional experience. They were (a) teamwork, (b) student learning, (c) career path, and (d) adult learning. Next, data were aggregated to identify trends and themes in the data set. Once again, this was done in an effort to search for relationships in the data while finding out where the emphasis and gaps in the data were. Career path was dropped during this level of analysis due to a lack of data to support it. This level of analysis yielded the following three remaining categories (a) teamwork, (b) student learning, and (c) adult learning.

Next, the categories from both questions on the rewards and challenges of supervising paraeducators were cross-analyzed to yield patterns that merged with previous codes, creating four major themes: (a) teamwork, (b) perception of leadership, (c) professional development and training, and (d) student learning. During the cross-analysis, time and adult learning did not emerge as a major theme. Participant discussions of time and adult learning were almost hidden within and closely related to professional development and training. The following section highlights these themes in detail, with sample responses from participants.

*Teamwork.* A recurring theme in the literature on teaming was that teams must communicate in order to experience success. For example, Lambert, Kent, Richert, Collay & Dietz (1997) found that successful teams had open, honest communication within the team and throughout the organization. Further, teamwork between the special education teacher and paraeducator was marked as particularly rewarding because of the



direct benefits to students. The following responses capture the expressions of special education teachers in the present study: “It gives me another person to bounce ideas off and keeps me on my toes. We work together to ensure that we provide a quality of support that enables our students to be successful” and “We work so closely as a team and I respect their position in a way that encourages teamwork.”

It also important to note that prior to the cross-analysis, teamwork, or the lack thereof, emerged as a code on the challenges list. Some of the negative responses of participants included: “There is not a sense of teamwork or fairness, there is no respect” and “There is little time to work as a team about how to problem solve.”

*Perception of leadership.* Respondents clearly communicated anxieties surrounding their feelings of being a leader within the relationship. The overall perceptions leaned more toward those of a colleague than a supervisor. These explanations were specifically focused on what they considered lack of preparation to carry out supervisory tasks. Interestingly, one of the six key supervisory tasks in the adapted framework, directing and delegating, occurred in few responses.

“I do not think of myself as supervising the paraeducator that I work with, because we function as a team. [The paraeducator] is just as qualified as I am to provide services. She is a former general educator who brings a lot of knowledge to the table.”

While the rewards of supervising paraeducators are clear, respondents identified the high yearly turnover rate of paraeducators as a major challenge of their supervisory responsibilities. Special educator teachers have no input about hiring paraeducators. The employment of paraeducators appears to be linked to their perceptions of supervision. In

fact, the need to supervise paraeducators has been seen as an additional chore by the respondents. The lack of time to plan work assignments for paraeducators was noted as a challenge, in addition to special education teachers having difficulty verbalizing or providing feedback concerning other peoples' weaknesses. For example, "I am not a leader, and because I consider them my friends and my co-workers, corrections and criticism are not easy." Others commented, "I don't like confronting paraeducators with the things they could do better after all, she is helping."

Additionally, special education teachers noted lack of perceived leadership due to the fact that the school principal has responsibility for evaluating the paraeducators and special education administrator are around to sometimes them, this left little the way of formal supervising them to do.

*Professional development and training.* Participants agreed that effective supervision of paraeducators requires time and preparation. Respondents expressed the need for professional development regarding the supervision of paraeducators. The lack of training for both teachers and paraeducators was identified as a major limitation. Responses to training included the lack of time allotted to participate in professional development activities. Participants reported a need for training with tasks such as planning and delegating. Not only is lack of training opportunities a concern, so is the lack of time to properly train the paraeducators with whom they work, "There is not enough time for formal training nor are there many opportunities for training." Another participant noted, "The school I work in offers them [paraeducators] no clear training or job description."

Another interesting element of training emerged involving the need to train fellow adults, "There is the possibility of having staff members that lack skills or vision of what special education can achieve." Professional development of both paraeducators and their supervising teacher emerged as an area of great need.

*Student learning.* Continued analysis of participant responses revealed concerns about student learning. This theme was supported by comments such as,

"They [paraeducators] are such an important part of serving the student. They [paraeducators] both interact with me and give me feedback on how the students interact or respond with their help. We can compare notes and offer each other suggestions on what has worked and what has not."

Rewards of supervising paraeducators were noted in comments such as, "It allows the strengths of both the teacher and paraeducators to be incorporated into the program for student success."

"It is great to see the results of when teachers can work closely with paraeducators in meeting the student's educational needs."

"My paraeducators are here to service the needs of my students. They have a love for children and intuitively meet their needs on a daily basis. They support my program with diligence and excellence."

"You can assist in molding and utilizing another person to assist in the overall students' successes."

Participants were aware of the reality that having two adults in the room made a difference in their abilities to serve more students. This was viewed as a reward of supervising paraeducators.

Teamwork, perceptions of leadership, professional development and training, and student learning emerged as themes regarding the challenges and rewards of supervising paraeducators. Special education teachers enjoyed the rewards of working with paraeducators but did not view themselves as supervisors. Special education teachers reported this as being due in part to the lack of training they have received as well as the lack of time for them to conduct training with paraeducators.

### Research Question 3

To what extent do the special education teachers engage in the following supervisory functions: (a) planning work assignments, (b) directing or delegating tasks, (c) clarifying roles, (d) monitoring performance, (e) evaluating performance, and (f) providing training for paraeducators?

Frequencies were run on each item individually. Items were then grouped by supervisory function to yield a mean and standard deviation score (see Table 4. 5) for each function. Respondents were given five specific statements within six supervisory functions, for a total of 30 items. These items were presented in a 5-point Likert scale format with a request for participants to rate themselves by indicating the degree to which their supervision of paraeducators correlated with each statement. The following Likert scale was included as a part of the survey instrument:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always

Average scores for all respondents show participants as rating themselves highest within the supervisory function of role clarification. Average scores for respondents fall in the sometimes range for planning work assignments, directing or delegating tasks, and monitoring performance. Average scores for evaluating performance, and mentoring and

training fell within the “seldom” range. However, it is interesting to note that average scores for mentoring and training ( $X=2.82$ ,  $SD=.65$ ) fall below evaluating ( $X=2.97$ ,  $SD=1.09$ ). Scores in the minimum column represent the lowest observed value for each supervisory task, while scores in the maximum column represent the largest observed value for each supervisory task.

Table 4.5

*Means and Standard Deviations for Key Supervisory Functions*

	<i>X</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min.	Max.	<i>N</i>
Planning Work Assignments	3.73	.76	2.86	4.65	49
Directing or Delegating Tasks	3.78	.63	2.92	4.35	49
Clarifying Roles	4.72	.70	3.78	4.20	49
Monitoring Performance	3.58	.62	3.35	3.72	49
Evaluating Performance	2.97	1.09	2.39	3.35	49
Mentoring and Training	2.82	.65	1.65	3.76	49

The following section provides an analysis of average scores for the six supervisory tasks. These scores were analyzed by the two variables of school level and years supervising paraeducators, and are reported in Tables 4.6 and 4.7, respectively.

An analysis of scores by school level (elementary, middle, or high) are presented in Table 4.6. This information outlines mean scores for 26 elementary school teachers ranging from 2.8 in mentoring and on-the-job training to 3.9 in clarifying roles. Mean scores for 12 middle school teachers ranged from 2.8 in the areas evaluating performance and mentoring and on-the-job training to 4.3 in clarifying roles. Similarly, mean scores for 11 high school teachers ranged from 2.7 in mentoring and on-the-job training to 4.0 in clarifying roles. Scores within the supervisory task of monitoring performance were exactly the same and showed no difference across settings. However, scores within the

tasks of directing and delegating and planning work assignments had minimal differences.

Table 4.6

*Mean Scores for Key Supervisory Functions by School Setting*

Setting	Directing or Delegating	Planning Assign.	Clarifying Roles	Monitoring Perf.	Evaluating Perf.	Mentoring & Training
High Mean	3.7	3.5	4.0	3.6	2.8	2.7
<i>N</i>	11	11	11	11	11	11
<i>SD</i>	.68	.71	.59	.72	1.13	.66
Middle Mean	3.9	3.9	4.3	3.6	2.8	2.8
<i>N</i>	12	12	12	12	12	12
<i>SD</i>	.82	.97	.74	.51	1.22	.66
Elementary Mean	3.8	3.7	3.9	3.6	3.1	2.8
<i>N</i>	26	26	26	26	26	26
<i>SD</i>	.53	.69	.72	.65	1.03	.66

Table 4.7 presents mean scores for key supervisory functions by number of years supervising paraeducators. Mean scores for respondents show little difference in the areas of directing or delegating tasks and planning work assignments regardless of years supervising. Mean scores for 26 teachers having between 1 and 5 years; experience range from 2.7 mentoring and on-the-job training to 3.8 in clarifying roles. Mean scores for 12 respondents having between 6 to 10 years; experience range from 3.1 in mentoring and on-the-job training to 4.2 in clarifying roles. Mean scores for nine respondents having between 11 and 25 years' experience range from 2.7 in mentoring and on-the-job training

to 4.2 in clarifying roles. Mean scores for two teachers having more than 25 years of experience range from 3.3 in mentoring and on-the-job training to 4.5 in clarifying roles.

Respondents with more than 25 years of experience supervising paraeducators scored higher with the supervisory tasks clarifying roles ( $X = 4.5$ ), monitoring performance ( $X = 4.3$ ), and evaluating performance ( $X = 4.0$ ). Special education teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience supervising paraeducators had the lowest mean scores of all groups in clarifying roles and monitoring performance. However, respondents with the least amount of experience supervising paraeducators (1 to 5 years) and those with between 11 and 25 years' supervising paraeducators had the same mean scores of 2.8 within the evaluating performance task.

Table 4.7

*Mean Scores for Key Supervisory Functions by Number of Years Supervising Paraeducators*

Number of Years Supervising Paraeducators		Directing or Delegating	Planning Assign.	Clarifying Roles	Monitoring Perf.	Evaluate Perf.	Mentoring Objectives
1-5 years	Mean	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.4	2.8	2.7
	<i>N</i>	26	26	26	26	26	26
	<i>SD</i>	.60	.73	.61	.62	1.1	.57
6-10 years	Mean	3.8	3.7	4.2	3.7	3.2	3.1
	<i>N</i>	12	12	12	12	12	12
	<i>SD</i>	.47	.66	.80	.68	1.1	.76
11-25 years	Mean	3.8	3.8	4.2	3.7	2.8	2.7
	<i>N</i>	9	9	9	9	9	9
	<i>SD</i>	.98	1.10	.77	.44	1.2	.63
More than 25 years	Mean	3.8	3.9	4.5	4.3	4.0	3.3
	<i>N</i>	2	2	2	2	2	2
	<i>SD</i>	.00	.71	.42	.42	.85	.71

Special education teachers in both middle and high school settings seem confident with the supervisory task of role clarification; however, respondents in all three levels

(elementary, middle, and high) reported lower scores in the area of mentoring and on-the-job training. Regardless of number of years supervising paraeducators respondents' mean scores were higher on tasks related to clarifying roles. Again, tasks related to evaluating performance, mentoring, and on-the-job training yielded lower mean scores and fell within the "seldom" range.

#### Research Question 4

Analysis of the fourth research question about the relationship between the special education teachers' supervisory practices and specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators involved survey items 12 and 22-51. Survey item number 12 questioned participants about their professional preparation for working with paraeducators. Respondents were asked to answer "yes" or "no" to the question, Have you had any specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators? Participant responses indicated 71% ( $n = 35$ ) had no specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators, while 29% ( $n = 14$ ) indicated that they did have preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators.

To determine the relationship between the six supervisory functions and preservice or inservice preparation, data were analyzed from survey item number 12 and Likert scale items 22-51. Table 4.8 presents the mean scores for the six key supervisory functions by preservice or inservice preparation. As illustrated, mean scores of 4.0 were reported for the area of role clarification by 35 participants who indicated not receiving any preservice or inservice preparation. The same mean score (4.0) was reported by 14



participants who had received preservice preparation. Both groups of teachers indicated they completed the supervisory tasks associated with role clarification frequently. Similar comparisons yielding similar findings were made for the five remaining supervisory functions with the exception of evaluating performance where the mean score of 3.2 (“sometimes”) was reported by participants with no preservice or inservice preparation; and the mean score of 2.5 (“seldom”) was reported by participants who had some degree of preservice or inservice preparation.

Table 4.8

*Mean Scores for Key Supervisory Functions by Preparation*

Preparation		Directing or Delegating	Planning Assign.	Clarifying Roles	Monitoring Perf.	Evaluating Perf.	Mentoring & Training
No	Mean	3.8	3.7	4.0	3.6	3.2	2.8
	N	35	35	35	35	35	35
Yes	Mean	3.8	3.8	4.0	3.5	2.5	2.8
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14
Total	Mean	3.8	3.7	4.0	3.6	3.0	2.8
	N	49	49	49	49	49	49

Mean scores for the tasks directing or delegating, clarifying roles, and mentoring and training showed no differences in whether or not special education teachers had preparation for supervising paraeducators. Little differences were seen in planning work assignments and monitoring performance. However, a more substantial difference was found with the supervisory task evaluating performance. Here respondents with no preparation had an average mean score of 3.2 indicating they “sometimes” perform this tasks. By comparison, respondents with some measure of preparation had an average score of 2.5 indicating they “seldom” perform tasks associated with evaluating performance.

### Summary

The underlying purpose of this study was to examine the practices and perceptions of special education teachers with regard to their supervision of paraeducators. The rationale was that while the literature in this area is limited, what is available surrounding the six supervisory practices could assist in gaining insight into the special education teachers' supervisory practices of paraeducators in inclusive settings. The researcher anticipated that through an investigation of these key supervisory practices, essential elements for preservice training and professional development of special education teachers would emerge. Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data provided insight into the current supervisory practices and perceptions of special education teachers.

The demographic data analysis revealed the majority of participants to be female. Sixty-three percent of participants had a master's degree, and 80% of the total survey population reported holding a full license in the area taught at the time the survey was administered. Just over half of the respondents were elementary school teachers (53%), and 56% reported spending most of their time working as inclusive support teachers. Additionally, more than half of the teachers had between 6 and 29 years of teaching experience.

Analysis of the data with regard to the supervisory practices of special education teachers working with paraeducators revealed that annual evaluation of paraeducators was most often completed by the principal (49%) or the special education administrator (27%) using tools such as observations and rating scales. None of the participants indicated having input into the evaluation process. Not surprisingly, respondents were

also unsure about the extent to which the year-end evaluation of paraeducators was based on their job descriptions.

About three-fourths (71%) of the participants had received no preparation regarding supervising paraeducators in their college preparation programs. Mean scores assisted in determining the extent to which special education teachers carried out supervisory tasks. Role clarification (4.0) was consistently reported as a supervisory task in which special education teachers frequently engaged. However, a bivariate correlation analysis yielded no significant relationship between any of the tasks associated with role clarification and preservice preparation. Not all special education teachers in the study population viewed themselves as supervisors. However, those who did were in agreement that effective supervision of paraeducators required not only time, but preparation as well.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

The supervision of special education paraeducators is currently a topic of concern and study (French, 1999, 2001; Giangreco, et al., 1997; Likins & Morgan, 1999; Marks et al., 1999; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997). Several issues have increased the significance of paraeducator preparation and supervision. They include:

- The reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and IDEA which outline the legal and ethical considerations (French, 1999, 2001) of special education service delivery personnel and the required level of expertise and competence;
- The recent dramatic rise in the number of paraeducators used in special education service delivery (French, 1999, 2002; Jones & Bender, 1993; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997);

- The lack of preservice and inservice supervisory preparation for general education and special education teachers (French, 1999, 2001).

Despite agreement by Ashbaker and Morgan (1999), Dover (2001), French (1999), and Pickett (1999) that teacher supervisory roles are appropriate, there is little in the literature that provides a picture of what teachers are doing with regard to paraeducators (French, 2001). More information regarding current paraeducator supervisory practices is needed. This study measured teachers' perceptions regarding their supervision of paraeducators. The results provide a picture of current practice for a local school division in southeast Virginia.

This study described the supervisory practices of special education teachers. Survey responses of special education teachers who indicated a range of experiences working with and supervising paraeducators were collected and analyzed. A total of 49 surveys were analyzed to answer the study's research questions:

1. What are the supervisory practices of special education teachers who work with paraeducators in inclusive settings?
2. What are the perceptions of special education teachers regarding their preparation to supervise paraeducators?
3. To what extent do special education teachers engage in the following supervisory functions: (a) planning work assignments, (b) directing or delegating tasks, (c) clarifying roles, (d) monitoring performance, (e) evaluating performance, and (f) training paraeducators?

4. What is the relationship between the special education teachers' supervisory practices and specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators?

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study and offers recommendations based on the findings. Suggestions for further study are also made.

### Discussion of Findings

Based on analysis of the data collected from this study, several conclusions can be drawn. Findings related to experience supervising paraeducators, lack preparation, and the six supervisory functions are discussed in this section.

#### *Experience Supervising Paraeducators*

The participants in this study had experience working with paraeducators, in fact, the majority (62%) reported currently supervising two or more paraeducators. Nevertheless, results of the qualitative analysis revealed that many of the special education teachers did not give themselves credit for actually supervising paraeducators. Respondents had various years of experience working with paraeducators (1 to over 25 years). The average number of years of experience working with paraeducators for all respondents was in the range of 1 to 5 years. The use of paraeducators to assist special education teachers has a long history. Thus, paraeducators have been a component of special education service delivery since 1975 when P.L. 94-142 was enacted. However, the role of the supervisor is new to special educators, and the participating school district had minimal regulations regarding the use and training of paraeducators. More than half of the respondents had between 6 and 29 years of teaching experience; however, they had

few years of experience supervising paraeducators. These factors must be considered when discussing the content of participant responses.

*Lack of Preparation for Working with Paraeducators*

Nearly three-fourths of participants indicated having no preparation for working with paraeducators. These figures are comparable to findings in other studies (Dover, 2002; French, 2001; Morgan, Cruziero, & Whorton, 1997). Dover similarly found that three-fourths of participants had no preservice preparation. Morgan et al. (1997) noted that 68% of the participants reported no formal preservice or inservice training. French (1997) found that 88% of the respondents reported that “real life experience” served as their primary source of knowledge and ability to supervise paraeducators.

Correspondingly, 78% of the participants in this study reported real-life experience as what contributed to their knowledge and ability to supervise. This implies that special education teachers may be using an intuitive method of supervision (French, 2001).

Based on these findings, future research might address to what degree discernment and insight affect the supervisory practices of special education teachers.

Federal regulations clearly stipulate that paraeducators must be appropriately supervised. While those regulations provide few guidelines for the determination of “appropriate” supervision, 71% of participants indicating “no preparation to work with paraeducators” hardly seems adequate. Even though the participating school district has a history of paraeducator use, the majority of special educators participating in this study reported between 1 to 5 years, experience working with paraeducators.

Participants were asked whether they had received formal preparation for the supervision of paraeducators; specifically, whether the preparation included any college

courses, workshops, conferences, or administrative assistance. Results indicated that 92% ( $n = 45$ ) did not have an entire college course that contributed to their ability to supervise. However, 29% ( $n = 14$ ) indicated that part of a college course contributed to their ability to supervise paraeducators. Additionally, 69% ( $n = 34$ ) reported that conference sessions made no contribution to their ability to supervise paraeducators.

Results indicated that special education teachers had knowledge of the fact that paraeducators do receive formal evaluations; however, they did not know whether year-end evaluations for paraeducators were based on their job descriptions. The principal or special education administrator held ultimate responsibility for the formal evaluations of paraeducators in this local school district. Rating scales and observations were reported as the primary tool used to evaluate paraeducators.

The importance of appropriate supervision has been addressed in federal regulations; however the preparation for performing those supervisory tasks are not as clear-cut. The lack of preparation for working with paraeducators was not only an issue addressed in this study, but also a topic of concern for a number of researchers (Chissom, 2002; Dover, 2002, French, 2001; Pickett, 1999). Similar findings across the studies mentioned above support the results of this research study in terms of the importance of quality preparation.

### *Key Supervisory Functions*

The organizational relationship between the individual providing supervision and the person or persons being supervised has several developmental dimensions (Glickman et al. 2001). These dimensions include directive control, directive informational, collaborative, and nondirective. For example, persons functioning at low levels of



development, expertise, and commitment benefit most from directive control supervision, whereas people who are motivated and need assistance identifying causes and solutions, implementing strategies, and monitoring their progress most likely benefit from a directive informational style of supervision. Typically, directive control supervision should be used by only supervisors in line relationships with teachers. These are supervisors who have been given formal authority by the organization for teachers they supervise. Therefore, the directive control style would most appropriately be used by the principal instead of the special education teachers in this study. However, persons in a role such as lead teacher may use the directive informational or collaborative style of supervision. These are persons in reciprocal assistance relationships (Glickman et al. 2001). Given the fact that the historic role of supervision has been control, teachers who have moved into the role of supervisors encountered challenges such as lack of formal authority to supervise or lack of training in clinical supervision. In fact, special education teachers in this study seemed to have a narrow sense of supervision. Many of their views were connected to the supervisor as evaluator.

Some findings from this study are similar to those of Chissom (2002). That is many teachers do not realize they are responsible for supervising paraeducators, and others are not aware of what constitutes the effective supervision of paraeducators (Chissom, 2002). This section reviews results of the key supervisory functions and how they compare to the literature.

*Role clarifying.* Colleagues in the same classroom often are unsure of their roles and boundaries and, therefore, tend to overlap in their responsibilities. Misperception of roles complicates issues of supervision (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; French,

1997). The majority of participants in this study reported having clear distinction between roles and responsibilities of the teacher and paraeducator. Not surprisingly, they rated themselves highest in the area of role clarification. Since the previous studies in the literature recognize the importance of supervision and that this is where supervision begins (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Prigge, 1996), special education teachers reporting themselves as frequently engaging in role clarification may indicate a level of readiness for continued professional development in the area. Future training that builds on the clarification of roles between teacher and paraeducator may lead to the use of other supervisory tasks.

*Planning work assignments.* This supervisory task includes providing written plans for the paraeducator to follow (Chissom, 2002; Dover, 2001; French, 1997). While planning may be either formal or informal, it is always the responsibility of the teacher. Scores for planning work assignments were consistently within the “seldom” range, regardless of preparation, school setting, or years supervising paraeducators. Comparatively, Chissom (2002) found planning time involving teachers and paraeducators took place on an average of about 10 minutes in the morning. Further research is needed to ascertain the content of the daily or weekly face-to-face meetings between the teacher and paraeducators.

*Directing or delegating tasks.* The direction and delegation of tasks was not mentioned often in the review of literature. It is unknown whether this finding is due to this function not being present within the studies or not being an identified variable by the researcher prior to conducting their studies. Responsible delegation can assist paraeducators in gaining new skills and initiative. Research indicates that teachers do not

have the preparation for, nor are they comfortable directing or delegating tasks to paraeducators (Cramer, 1997; French, 1997, 1998), which implies there may be a lack of understanding as to how to utilize paraeducators within the classroom setting. Results of this study revealed no difference between directing or delegating tasks for teachers by preservice or inservice preparation, school setting, or number of years supervising paraeducators. Participants rated themselves as “sometimes” completing supervisory tasks outlined in the survey instrument.

*Monitoring performance.* Performance monitoring has been viewed by educators as an extra burden on a teacher’s already full schedule of duties (Chissom, 2002). However, it is essential to ensure that paraeducators are performing their duties responsibly. Observation was reported as the primary tool used to evaluate paraeducators. Further research may be done to determine whether or not these are structured formal observations or informal observations. There is also a need to clarify what are considered acceptable methods of monitoring performance of paraeducators and when monitoring takes place. This leads to the question of how much training teachers have received with regard to their observation techniques of paraeducators. Even informal assessment of paraeducator performance can be time consuming; however, the opportunity to reinforce positive behaviors through observation should not be overlooked (Blasé & Kirby, 2000).

*Evaluating performance.* This supervisory task focuses on ensuring fulfillment of job descriptions, providing constructive feedback, and issuing reprimands when needed (Dover, 2001). French (1998) found that teachers often were responsible for evaluating paraeducators or co-evaluating them with the principal. Interestingly, participants in this study with preparation to supervise had lower scores associated with tasks related to

evaluating performance than those who had no preparation. Traditional models of supervision regard evaluation as an administrative function. Given that administrators might consider working closely with teachers to establish clarity about who will complete the evaluation of paraeducators. Teachers in middle and high school settings had lower scores than those in elementary settings in this area. Only teachers with more than 25 years of experience ( $n = 2$ ) reported scores higher than the “seldom” range. While overall mean scores in the area of evaluating performance were low, it is important to note that in the internal reliability analysis for Likert-scale items, participants responded consistently, yielding the highest alpha score (.8497) of all six indexes.

*Mentoring and on-the-job training.* Teachers can provide on-the-job training in numerous ways, which include meeting formally or informally, modeling, providing feedback, and coaching paraeducators through various situations. While this should be common practice for teachers who are responsible for both supervising paraeducators and providing instruction for students with special needs, participants responded within the “seldom” range for tasks associated with mentoring and on-the-job training. Moreover, there was no difference whether or not teachers had preservice preparation. There was also no difference in this area across school settings. However, teachers having 6 to 10 years’ experience scored higher in the “sometimes” range than teachers with 1 to 5 years and 11 to 25 years’ experience. Research has noted ongoing classroom-based supervision to be a critical piece of paraeducator supervision (French, 1998; Giangreco et al., 1997). This supervision is best suited for the classroom teacher; yet teachers are often unprepared and uncomfortable when asked to supervise paraeducators (French, 1998; Frith & Lindsey, 1982; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

The six supervisory tasks discussed in the literature review and explored as a part of this descriptive study have some common characteristics and are not distinct functions. Research supports the inclusion of tasks such as role clarifying (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; French, 1997; Giangreco et al., 1997; McClain, 1993; Milner, 1998), planning (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; Giangreco et al., 1997), and training (D'Aquanni, 1997; French, 1997) as specific skills needed in the supervision of paraeducators. Additionally, due to the fact that research in this area is just emerging, there is some overlap in the meanings of supervisory tasks; consequently, these tasks do not serve as distinct functions. It is hoped that through continued research into paraeducator supervision specific characteristics regarding these tasks will emerge.

#### Limitations

This study was restricted to one school district in southeast Virginia. Forty-nine special education teachers in elementary, middle and high schools served as participants. Participants were limited to volunteers. While teacher perceptions and practices of paraeducator supervision were obtained, perceptions of paraeducators and administrators were not. Additionally, the study was dependent upon teacher self-report. This assumes that participants' responses were an accurate representation of actual practice. Experiences of the participants surveyed as a part of this study may not reflect those of others working in other classroom or school settings around the state and country.

#### Recommendations

The number of paraeducators in schools continues to grow. This growth has led to changing responsibilities of paraeducators and has also required teachers to assume supervisory roles they report having received no training for and often find

uncomfortable. Both No Child Left Behind (2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities *Education Act* (1997) have an impact on teachers supervising paraeducators; however, no information is provided about what supervision entails. Research supports the notion that special education teachers deserve to be prepared to plan, direct, delegate, train, monitor, evaluate, and otherwise supervise paraeducators (Chissom, 2002; D'Aquanni, 1997; Dover, 2001; French & Pickett, 1997; Rose, 2000). This study grew out of my concern that the quality of supervision of paraeducators has implications for both special education teachers and paraeducators as well the efficient use of paraeducators in inclusive classrooms. The following implications for administrative practice and future research are based on findings from this study and supported by results from previous studies.

*Implications for Administrative and Personnel Preparation Practice*

Special education teachers in this study could benefit from having a clear understanding of what their supervisory responsibilities are. The following recommendations resulting from this study include topics for collaboration and consultation, short-term strategies to increase paraeducator support through supervision, and long-term strategies aimed at specific supervisory practices that happen consistently and should lead to better practices.

District guidelines and building-level practices regarding the supervision of special education paraeducators should be developed and implemented. Such implementation would lead to clearly defined supervisory practices and what these practices look like, formal or informal, from the perspective of teachers, administrators and special education administrators. School districts should also make a greater effort to

offer training to teachers working with paraeducators. Certainly, the quality of training should be considered by beginning with training initiatives that have been successful in other states. Local administrators might consider collaborating with community colleges as a way of providing continuous skill development special education teachers and paraeducators alike. When collaborating with institutions of higher education, distance education may also be considered as an option. The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (NRCP) has information about national and state training initiatives available through on-line resources. In addition, researchers such as Doyle (1997), French (2001), Pickett (1999), and Pickett and Gerlach (1997) have created professional development materials for use in inclusive settings. A compilation of similar materials can be found on page 45 of this dissertation.

Supervision of paraeducators should be seen as a priority by collaborating teachers. General and special education teachers have many duties to fulfill throughout the day. Rethinking how the supervision of paraeducators is viewed may increase the efficiency and effectiveness of classroom teachers. Dover (2001) and Doyle (1997) have published a number of documents that may lend support to special educators in teaching students with special needs while directing and delegating tasks to paraeducators.

Paraeducator roles, responsibilities, and task assignments should be better defined to help teachers assume responsibility for paraeducators' actions and monitor their performance in the inclusive classroom. Pickett (1999) has created samples of such documents to help understand and implementing the important tasks of monitoring performance. Further, states such as Washington and Virginia have created training manuals that might assist with defining paraeducator roles and responsibilities.

Special education teachers should be encouraged and trained to evaluate the performance of paraeducators and to provide on-the-job training through modeling, demonstration, and mentoring of skills. This could include mentoring for teachers to become better supervisors of paraeducators and also mentoring specifically for paraeducators. Coaching has been found to be an effective training practice, because it allows for the fine-tuning of newly acquired skills until the skill can become solidly cemented into the repertoire of the paraeducator (French & Pickett, 1997). Coaching has occurred on the job while the paraeducator worked with students. Just as coaching of Olympic athletes consists of giving and receiving feedback about performance, coaching of paraeducators would consist of essential instructional and other job duties (Vasa & Steckelberg, 1997). This analogy could be useful when considering the application of supervisory tasks to the roles of special education teachers.

School districts should encourage and increase opportunities for collaboration between special education teachers and paraeducators. Sixty percent of the participants in this study ( $n = 29$ ) reported holding daily meetings with the paraeducators they supervise. This same number of respondents reported the length of these meetings to be less than 15 minutes. Early analysis of qualitative data noted time constraints as a hindrance. Administrators need to ensure adequate time is built into the school day for teachers and paraeducators to plan together. Teachers should ask for more collaborative planning time and administrators should increase efforts to include collaborative planning time into school and district planning schedules. Although this could have significant funding implications for schools, there are ways schools can work around this. For example, time could be allotted to special education teachers and paraeducators for planning on work



days when paraeducators are already scheduled to be in the building. Additionally, compensatory time could be provided for paraeducators who stay after contracted hours to plan with teachers. Because quantitative data from this study reflect that administrators and special education administrators have ultimate responsibility, these personnel may want to consider “thinking outside of the box” in order to develop and implement viable solutions. Special education teachers deserve to have state and district guidelines as well as professional preparation related to planning, meeting facilitation, on-the-job training, and the appropriate directing and delegating of tasks.

Professionals responsible for the preparation of special education teachers must recognize the importance of clinical supervision and work toward its inclusion into quality preservice and inservice professional development programs. Special educators should be reminded and encouraged to maintain ongoing communication and provide constant feedback with paraeducators. Ongoing communication and feedback about instructional support to students should not be seen as the responsibility of one supervisor, but as the responsibility of all professionals working with paraeducators. The daily supervision of paraeducators has fallen largely on the shoulders of special education teachers who were relatively unprepared to assume this supervisory role (French, 1998). Program management and administrative functions are needed (Friend & Cook, 1996; Vasa & Steckelberg, 1997) among special education teachers serving students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings. Awareness of the value of quality preparation and professional development programs for special education teachers and paraeducators should be considered by this local school district.

#### *Implications for Further Research*

Further study is needed regarding the supervision of paraeducators supporting special education students in inclusive settings. This study focused on the practices and perceptions of 49 special education teachers in a local school district. Since only the practices and perceptions of special education teachers were described in this study, the perceptions of other key personnel should be sought for further examination and comparison. Other key personnel whose perceptions and opinions could impact appropriate paraeducator supervision include building administrators, special education administrators, and general education teachers. Undoubtedly, the perceptions of paraeducators themselves would also provide insight into the various supervisory functions carried out by special education teachers.

Another topic for future research is that of policy and regulations surrounding paraeducator supervision. There appears to be a lack of consistency between federal, state, and local policies and standards. Since its inception, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has specified that special education students should receive their services from paraeducators who are appropriately trained and supervised. In addition, with the initiation of the No Child Left Behind Act, there are many new implications for paraeducators, their preparation and development that must be explored. Additional study is needed of the policies and procedures developed by school districts to respond to these two federal mandates.

The review of the literature revealed resources and programs that are available for the preparation of administrators and teachers who work with paraeducators (Vasa et al., 1986; Pickett, 1986; 1995 Vasa & Steckelberg, 1988). Future research might involve using available data from such programs in addressing the impact on quality of training

and professional development of special education teachers, special education coordinators, and building principals. Specifically, the collection of data may include the evaluation of paraeducators with a focus on with whom the responsibility lies. It would also be important to consider how to maintain a collaborative style of supervision while fulfilling the supervisory function of evaluation.

Additional research is also needed on the educational background and experience of the paraeducators being supervised. While No Child Left Behind calls for highly qualified paraeducators, local school districts are still striving to meet the requirement. Information such as this may lead to a clearer explanation of when and to what extent special education teachers need to engage in the six supervisory tasks outlined as a part of this study.

This study did not involve classroom observations or other collection of evidence (i.e., copies of evaluations, paraeducator job descriptions and work schedules). Further investigation with this same population or a similar population should include classroom and meeting observations, collection of evidence, and interviews. Such data could provide evidence of supervisory tasks performance that may or may not match the six supervisory tasks described in this study. For example, it might address the question, Are teachers actually providing more or less supervision than they perceive?

The impact that paraeducators have in inclusive settings serving students with disabilities may seem minimal. Results of qualitative analysis from this study revealed student learning as a theme. Thus, participating special education teachers clearly communicated their awareness that having two adults could make a difference in their ability to serve more students effectively. Also, respondents noted the impact on student

learning as a reward of supervising paraeducators. There is a need for more research to quantify effectiveness and capture a picture of what this looks like. This would afford researchers the opportunity to begin to measure the impact that paraeducators have on student achievement.

A collection of observational data could also provide a picture of paraeducator supervision that would not be based on the perceptions, but on actual performance of supervisory tasks. The collection of observational and interview data would also provide insights into how specific tasks are addressed by supervising teachers. Future studies might utilize other school districts where special education teachers supervise paraeducators in inclusive classrooms. Yet, another area of further study should use focus groups to determine solutions to identified barriers and necessary administrative supports, as well as the successful strategies, techniques and best practices regarding supervision of paraeducators in inclusive settings. Including general education classroom teachers would also lend an invaluable perspective. Many school districts offer formal mentoring programs for beginning teachers, further studies could address aspects of teacher mentoring specific to paraeducator supervision.

### Conclusions

A close look at the actual supervisory tasks performed by special education teachers revealed that, to some extent, personnel regularly engaged in many of the six supervisory functions. Traditionally, supervision of paraeducators is considered an administrative duty. This was evident in responses to questions related to who held ultimate responsibility for paraeducator supervision and completion of formal evaluations. However, in reviewing responses to supervisory tasks, evaluation was not

explicitly indicated in this study. While special education teachers clearly do not view themselves as supervisors, it is clear that they perform supervisory tasks as a regular part of their duties while interacting with the paraeducators with whom they work.

The survey respondents clearly communicated their use of supervisory tasks. Their participation and responses could be interpreted as a willingness to contribute to the responsibilities associated with effective paraeducator use in inclusive classrooms. Special education teachers acting as supervisors walk a fine line between instructional partner and manager, and must interact effectively with paraeducators. Such interactions require communication, cooperation, and collaboration. Collaborative practice involves more than just meeting and talking. In the context of the special educators' supervisory role, collaboration becomes a primary component of the teacher-paraeducator relationship and, therefore, the responsibility of preservice and inservice professional development programs. Additionally, school principals must be trained to support collaborative leadership practices in schools where special education teachers serve as supervisors of the paraeducators with whom they work.

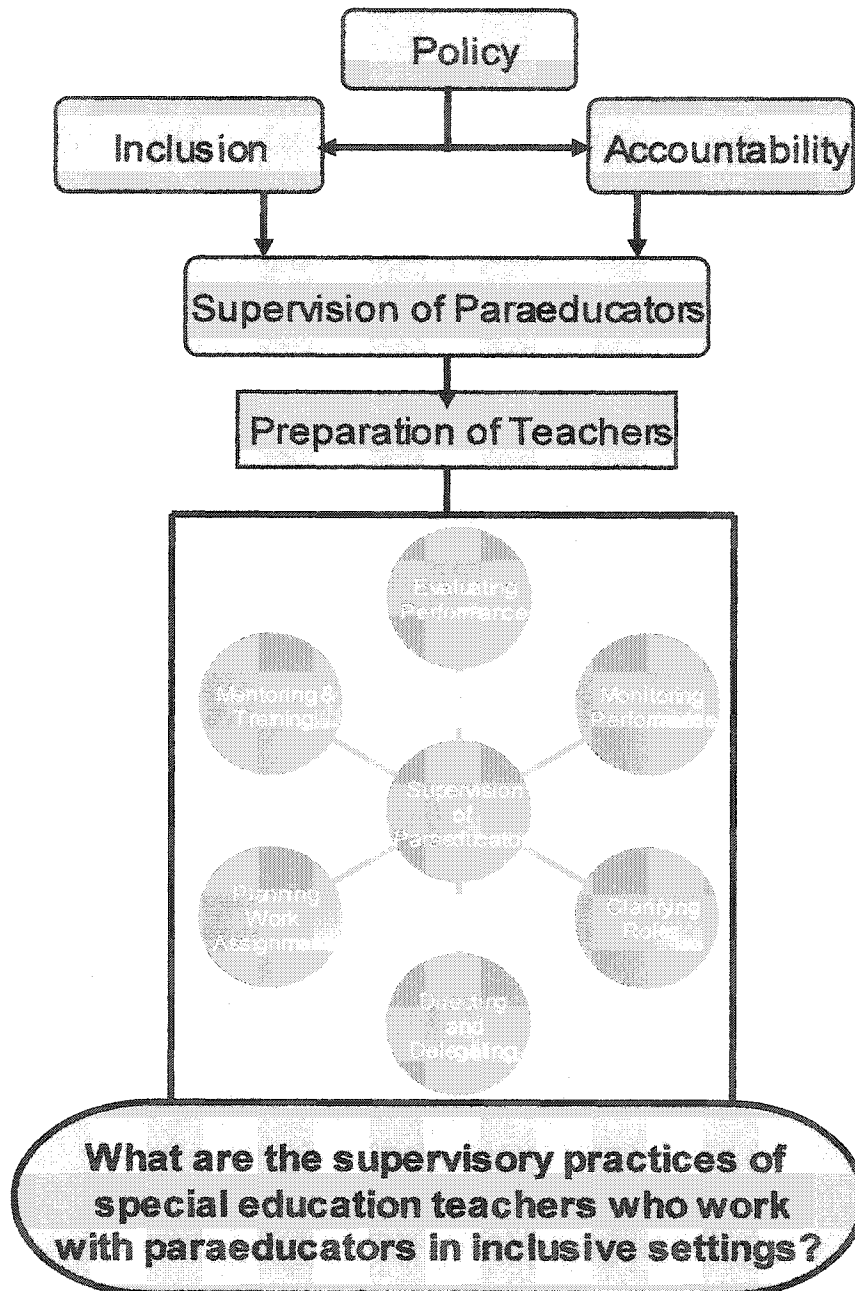
Finally, it must be recognized that the local school district participating in this study has a relatively experienced pool of special education teachers, with 68% of the respondents having more than 5 years' teaching experience. Twenty-nine teachers having between 6 and 25, and four with over 25 years of teaching experience lends to the integrity of responses along with the respondents' level of education and licensure. Specifically, 63% ( $n = 27$ ) of participants hold a master's degree and more than three-fourths (80%,  $n = 39$ ) are fully licensed in the area in which they currently teach. Further research could help to identify what existing communication infrastructures are in place

for paraeducators and their supervising teachers. This could also include identifying what type of communication structures would foster more effective paraeducator supervision in schools.

This study is important because it contributes information about how special education teachers in inclusive settings view their supervisory practices. The results have implications for special education teachers who provide supervision to paraeducators in inclusive settings and are interested in refining their supervisory skills. Considering the growing numbers of paraeducators in school settings today and the limited research on the topic of their supervision, this research makes a contribution to the knowledge base of current practices in supervising support personnel in public schools.

## Appendix A

## Conceptual Framework



## Appendix B

## Survey Instrument

The purpose of this survey is to examine the practices of special education teachers who supervise paraeducators. Your responses will provide valuable information about the types of training future educators will need as well as the kinds of support that current teachers could use as they supervise paraeducators. An operational definition of instructional supervision of paraeducators, as derived from Pickett's (1999) framework includes: (a) planning work assignments; (b) directing or delegating tasks to paraeducators; (c) sharing information with paraeducators regarding roles; (d) monitoring day-to-day performance of paraeducators; and (e) providing systematic on-the-job training and mentoring to paraeducators. For the purposes of this survey a **Supervising Teacher** is defined as a **licensed special education teacher who is responsible for supervising paraeducators working with special needs students**. It would be appreciated if you would respond to all of the items. In the interest of maintaining anonymity, please **DO NOT** write your name on this survey! No names will be attached to any survey at anytime.

## PART I – DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

- |  |  |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                                    |
|--|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <p>1. How many years of teaching have you completed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> This is my first year</li> <li><input type="radio"/> 1-5 years</li> <li><input type="radio"/> 6-10 years</li> <li><input type="radio"/> 11-25 years</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Over 25 years</li> </ul> <p>2. What is your gender?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Male</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Female</li> </ul> <p>3. What is the highest degree you now hold?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> B.S., B.A.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> M.A., M.Ed.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Ph.D., Ed.D.</li> </ul> <p>4. In which school setting do you currently work?<br/>(check all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Elementary</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Middle</li> <li><input type="radio"/> High School</li> </ul> <p>5. Select one position for which you spend the largest portion of your day?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Pull out Special Education Support Teacher</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Inclusive Support Teacher (Co-Teaching / Consulting with General Education)</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other _____</li> </ul> | <p>6. Select the phrase that best describes the general need level of the largest portion of your students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Mild/Moderate Needs</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Severe/Profound Needs</li> </ul> <p>8. The total number of students on your caseload is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> 10 or under</li> <li><input type="radio"/> 11-20</li> <li><input type="radio"/> 21-30</li> </ul> <p>9. How many paraeducators do you supervise?</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> 0</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> 1</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> 2</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> 3</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> 4</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> 5 or more</td> </tr> </table> <p><i>(If you answered zero to this question, you may stop here. Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study.)</i></p> <p>10. Please select the category that best describes the number of years you have supervised paraeducators?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> 1-5 years</li> <li><input type="radio"/> 6-10 years</li> <li><input type="radio"/> 11-25 years</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Over 25 years</li> </ul> <p>11. Indicate the type of certification you hold.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Full license in area currently teaching</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Full license, but teaching out of area</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Provisional</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Emergency</li> </ul> | <input type="checkbox"/> 0 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0   | <input type="checkbox"/> 1   |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2   | <input type="checkbox"/> 3   |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4   | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 or more   |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                                    |



## PART II - SUPERVISORY BACKGROUND INFORMATION

12. Have you had any specific preservice or inservice preparation for supervising paraeducators?  
☐ YES ☐ NO

13. Please designate how much of your knowledge and ability to supervise paraeducators comes from each of the following: (*None, Some, or Most*)

None    Some    Most

- ☐ ☐ ☐ Real life experience  
☐ ☐ ☐ An inservice on paraeducator supervision  
☐ ☐ ☐ Part of a college or university course was devoted to supervision of paraeducators  
☐ ☐ ☐ An entire college or university course was devoted to supervision of paraeducators  
☐ ☐ ☐ A conference session or course on the supervision of paraeducators  
☐ ☐ ☐ Assistance from the principal or other administrator

14. Do the paraeducators you supervise receive formal evaluations?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No, Skip to question #18

15. How frequently are paraeducators evaluated?

- ☐ Not evaluated  
☐ Annually  
☐ Every two years  
☐ Other
- 

16. What tool is used to evaluate paraeducators? (*Check all that apply*)

- ☐ Checklist  
☐ Observation  
☐ Rating scale  
☐ Narrative evaluation  
☐ Self-evaluation

17. Who holds the ultimate responsibility for the formal evaluation of paraeducators?

- ☐ Principal  
☐ Special Education Administrator or Supervisor  
☐ I do (Special Education Teacher)  
☐ Other
- 

18. To what extent is the year-end evaluation of paraeducators based on their job description?

- ☐ To a minimal extent  
☐ Partially  
☐ To a great extent  
☐ Don't know

19. Please rate the amount (frequency of contact) of supervision you provide.

- ☐ Frequent contact  
☐ Some contact  
☐ Little contact  
☐ No contact

20. How often do you hold formal face-to-face meetings?

- ☐ Daily  
☐ Weekly  
☐ Monthly  
☐ Every other month  
☐ One a year  
☐ Never

21. How long do formal face-to-face meetings usually last?

- ☐ Less than 15 minutes  
☐ 15 – 30 minutes  
☐ 30 – 45 minutes  
☐ More than 45 minute

### III - TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SUPERVISORY PRACTICES

**Directions:** For each statement below. Please choose one of the numbers in the five point scale to indicate the degree to which your supervision of paraeducators correlates with each statement. Circle the corresponding number. 1 = Never 2 = Seldom 3 = Sometimes 4 = Frequently 5 = Always

		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
<b>Planning Work Assignments</b>						
22	Written lesson plans are shared with paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
23	Paraeducator is given information regarding student IEP goals and accommodations.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Paraeducator and I sit down together to plan.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I provide information about general curriculum to the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I provide books, worksheets, or other instructional materials to the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Directing or delegating Tasks</b>						
27	The paraeducator is given assignment(s) to complete each day.	1	2	3	4	5
28	I prefer to leave tasks for the paraeducator to manage.	1	2	3	4	5
29	Specific tasks or duties are assigned to the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I prefer that the paraeducator try new activities independently.	1	2	3	4	5
31	I provide classroom schedules and procedures for the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Clarifying Roles</b>						
32	Paraeducator is informed about how to manage student behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
33	Expectations of paraeducator job responsibilities are communicated prior to beginning work.	1	2	3	4	5
34	Paraeducator assists with documentation of student performance.	1	2	3	4	5
35	I provide classroom rules and behavior expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
36	I clarify instructions, tasks, or duties assigned to the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Monitoring Performance</b>						
37	I correct inaccurate instruction by the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
38	I monitor the day-to-day classroom activities of the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
39	I provide regular performance feedback to the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
40	I regulate the level of assistance the paraeducator provides to a student.	1	2	3	4	5
41	I observe the paraeducator working with students	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Evaluating Performance</b>						
42	I evaluate the paraeducator's overall job performance.	1	2	3	4	5
43	I document how the paraeducator performs.	1	2	3	4	5
44	Specific methods are in place for sharing expected outcomes with the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
45	I offer feedback on paraeducator's performance.	1	2	3	4	5
46	I schedule formal or informal meetings with paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Mentoring and On-the-Job Training</b>						
47	Specific instructional and behavioral techniques are modeled for paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
48	I provide on-the-job training by coaching my paraeducator during guided practice sessions (as needed).	1	2	3	4	5
49	I mentor the paraeducator assigned to work with me.	1	2	3	4	5
50	I determine the training needs of the paraeducator.	1	2	3	4	5
51	I maintain documents or records of the paraeducators' on-the-job training.	1	2	3	4	5

**PART IV – OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES**

52. Supervising paraeducators is rewarding because....

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53. Supervising paraeducators is challenging because....

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE, FOR FURTHER INFORMATION RELATED TO THIS  
SURVEY, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT LOURY FLOYD.**

**Please return completed surveys no later than November 28, 2003 to:**

**Loury Ollison Floyd**

**P. O. Box 68**

**Hampton, VA 23669**

**lofloy@wm.edu**

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (PHONE: 757-221-3901) ON OCTOBER 7, 2003 AND EXPIRES ON OCTOBER 6, 2004.

Appendix C

Expert Panel Feedback Form

Dear [Insert Name Here]:

Thank you for agreeing to review the instrument **SURVEY OF TEACHER PRACTICES OF PARAEDUCATOR SUPERVISION**. Enclosed you will find a copy of research questions guiding the study as well as the actual cover letter and survey instrument participants will receive. After reviewing the cover letter and instrument, provide written responses the following questions. In addition to answering the questions, any comments you write on the documents would be appreciated please feel free to insert comments directly on the documents. When you have completed this process please use the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope to return all the material.

1. Were any items unclear? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
If yes, which ones were unclear and why?
  
2. Were the directions clear? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
If no, what would have made them more clear?
  
3. Based on the information in the cover letter, would you be persuaded to respond to the survey? ☐ Yes ☐ No
  
4. Is the format and layout pleasing? ☐ Yes ☐ No
  
5. Please make any suggestions for improving the survey or the cover letter?

Thank you for taking the time to review these materials! Please return all materials to:

Loury O. Floyd  
P. O. Box 68  
Hampton, VA 23669

Appendix D

Field Test Feedback Form

Dear :

Thank you for agreeing to serve in a field test of the **SURVEY OF TEACHER PRACTICES OF PARAEDUCATOR SUPERVISION**. Enclosed you will find a copy of all materials participants will receive. This field test study has four steps.

1. Sign the Informed Consent Form
2. Complete the survey
3. Provide written responses to the following questions on this sheet
4. Use the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope to return all material to the researcher.

1. How long did it take you to complete the survey?
- |                          |                                    |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ___ Less than 10 minutes | ___ 20 to 25 minutes               |
| ___ 10 to 15 minutes     | ___ 25 minutes or more, which were |
| ___ 15 to 20 minutes     | how many minutes? ____             |

2. Were any items unclear? ( ) Yes ( ) No  
If yes, which ones were unclear and why?

3. Were the directions clear? ( ) Yes ( ) No  
Did you have any questions about what you were supposed to do?

4. Based on the information in the cover letter, would you be persuaded to respond to the survey? ( ) Yes ( ) No

5. Is the format and layout pleasing? ( ) Yes ( ) No

6. Please make any suggestions for improving the survey or the cover letter?

Thank you for taking the time to review these materials! Please return all materials to:

Loury O. Floyd  
P. O. Box 68  
Hampton, VA 23669

## Appendix E

## Survey Informed Consent Form for Research Study Participants

I agree to complete a questionnaire as a part of the research project, "**Supervision of Paraeducators: Practices and Perceptions of Special Education Teachers**". The purpose of this study is to examine the practices of special education teachers who supervise paraeducators. My responses will provide valuable information about the types of training future educators will need as well as the kinds of support that current teachers could use as they supervise paraeducators.

I understand that the responses I provide on the survey will not be associated with me in any way, and there are no risks involved in completing an anonymous survey. I also understand that the completed survey instruments will be stored securely, and that only group-level data from the survey instrument will be reported. Individual comments from participants may be used to illustrate points in a written summary of results, however these quotes will always be provided namelessly. Upon completion of this study, I will receive a summary of results in my school mailbox.

Overall, the ultimate goal of this research study is to provide the researcher with information about how special education teachers supervise paraeducators. Information gathered may be used in developing future training experiences for current and newly hired teachers and paraeducators. Addressing such needs through training can improve both teacher and paraeducator job skills, which may indirectly improve educational services to students with special needs. Additionally, I understand that it is completely up to me whether or not I participate in this study, and I am free to withdraw from this research project at any time without questions. I also understand that the estimated amount of time to complete this questionnaire is 25 minutes.

The person responsible for conducting this research is Loury Floyd, she can be reached at [lofloy@wm.edu](mailto:lofloy@wm.edu) or 757/221-2406. Dr. Brenda Williams at The College of William & Mary will be supervising this research project and can be reached at [btwill@wm.edu](mailto:btwill@wm.edu) or 757/221-2325. Other members of the dissertation committee are Dr. Megan Tschannen-Moran and Dr. Lori Korinek. I am aware that I have if I feel that I have not been treated according to the description in this form, or that my rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, I may contact Dr. Stan Hoegerman, Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at 757/221-2240.

Participants' Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please sign both copies and return one in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope along with your completed survey no later than **November 28, 2003**.

You may keep the other for your records.

Appendix F

Letter to Participants

October 28, 2003

Dear Colleague:

As a former special education teacher, paraeducator, and a current doctoral student I understand both the rewards and challenges associated with supervising paraeducators, while working diligently to meet the needs of students with disabilities. I am conducting dissertation research and am very interested in your perceptions regarding the supervision of paraeducators in your setting. I have enlisted the support of your school division in distributing surveys to you. Information regarding your names and school locations have not be give to me.

Enclosed you will find a survey that should take approximately 20 - 30 minutes to complete. The purpose of this survey is to examine the practices of special education teachers who supervise paraeducators. Your responses will provide valuable information about the types of training future educators will need as well as the kinds of support that current teachers could use as they supervise paraeducators. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential. If you decide to participate, please sign the enclosed consent forms, return one to me and retain one for your records. A separate envelope has been furnished specifically for your return of the consent form. These forms will be maintained apart from the survey instrument and will not be used in any way in the analysis of data.

As a small token of appreciation please have a cup of tea on me. You also have the opportunity to enter a drawing for a FREE \$50.00 gift certificate to the Teacher and Parent Store (TAPS). To enter the drawing you must complete the survey, then fill out the card and return it to the address indicated on the card. The drawing will be held on December 1, 2003. Four special education teachers will receive gift certificates by mail, no later than December 15, 2003.

Please complete the survey, sign the consent form, and return them in the self-addressed stamped envelopes today. Surveys should be mailed no later than November 28, 2003. If you have any questions, please contact Lory Floyd by phone at 757/850- 4948 or by email at [lofloy@wm.edu](mailto:lofloy@wm.edu). I appreciate your consideration and assistance with this study that promises to make an important contribution. Thank you for your time and attention. Please take a moment to respond today.

Sincerely,

Lory O. Floyd  
Doctoral Candidate  
The College of William & Mary

Please mail completed surveys to:  
Paraeducator Supervision Survey  
**Lory O. Floyd**  
**P. O. Box 68**  
**Hampton, VA 23669**

Appendix G

Participant Response Card

_____ Date
<p>ATTENTION:</p> <p>I have completed the survey instrument <b>SURVEY OF TEACHER PRACTICES OF PARAEDUCATOR SUPERVISION</b> and returned it in the self-addressed envelope. Please include my name in the drawing for a \$50.00 gift certificate to the Teacher and Parent Store (TAPS).</p> <p>If my name is drawn, please mail my prize to:</p> <p>_____ Name</p> <p>_____ Mailing Address</p> <p>_____ City, State, Zip Code</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Paraeducator Supervision Survey P. O. Box 68 Hampton, VA 23669</p> <p>I understand that this card must be returned no later than November 28, 2003, and that if my card is drawn I will receive a gift certificate to TAPS no later than December 15, 2003.</p>
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Appendix H

Reminder Post Card

_____ Date
<p>Dear Special Educator:</p> <p>About two weeks ago you received a survey titled <b>SURVEY OF TEACHER PRACTICES OF PARAEDUCATOR SUPERVISION</b>. Your thoughts on this topic are very important; your responses may have an impact on future training and professional development. The survey takes approximately 20 minutes to complete - won't you please do it today? If you have misplaced the survey, please call Loury Floyd at 757-850-4948 or e-mail <a href="mailto:lofloy@wm.edu">lofloy@wm.edu</a> for a new one. I appreciate your help with this important project!</p> <p>Best regards,</p> <p>Loury Floyd, Doctoral Candidate The College of William &amp; Mary</p>

<p>Paraeducator Supervision Survey P.O. Box 68 Hampton, VA 23669</p> <p><i>We're waiting to hear from you!</i></p>
--

## Appendix I

Numeric Codes For Data Entry	
Code	Dependent Variable
Years of Teaching Completed	
1	This is my first year
2	1-5 years
3	6-10 years
4	11-25 years
5	Over 25 years
6	No Response
Current School Setting	
0 or 1	Elementary
0 or 2	Middle
0 or 3	High School
4	No Response
Number of Paraprofessionals Supervised	
1	One
2	Two
3	Three
4	Four
5	Five or more
6	No Response
Specific Preparation	
1	Yes
2	No
3	No Response
Years Supervising Paraprofessionals	
1	1-5 years
2	6-10 years
3	11-25 years
4	Over 25 years
5	No Response
Type of Certification	
1	Full license in area currently teaching
2	Full license, but teaching out of area
3	Provisional
4	Emergency

Appendix J

Letter of Permission to Conduct Research

September 21, 2004  
205 Captains Court  
Hampton, VA 23669

Assistant Superintendent for Instruction  
\_\_\_\_\_ County Public Schools

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership program at The College of William & Mary. My proposed dissertation study focuses on the practices and perceptions of special education teachers in regard to how they supervise paraeducators. I am most interested in conducting research in your school district because of local efforts made to ensure that students with special needs have access to general education settings or "inclusive" classrooms.

I have met with Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, Supervisor of Student Services for \_\_\_\_\_ County Public Schools who, pending approval is willing to support this study and agrees that it will provide valuable and pertinent information to better inform our professional practice. The study will be descriptive in nature and involve the use of an anonymous, confidential survey instrument. The survey instrument will serve as the sole method of data collection. It is anticipated that findings and conclusions from this study will identify potential areas for future research, and provide information to assist with preparing preservice programs and preservice training.

Special education teachers will be sought as voluntary participants in this study. Those who agree to participate will be asked to sign a consent form, complete the survey, and return it in an addressed stamped envelope provided. Those agreeing to participate will receive a minimal incentive. Additionally, each participating teacher may opt to be part of a drawing to receive a gift certificate in the amount of \$50.00 from the Teacher and Parents Store (TAPS). Participants will be assured that their right to confidentiality will be honored. Neither the school district nor participants in the study will be identified or associated in any way with the information provided. Upon completion of the study a copy of the dissertation will be distributed to the administrator in charge of special education.

This letter is eliciting your support for my study by granting permission to conduct the research and providing a list of special education teachers currently employed by your school district. This support is requested pending final approval of the Human Subjects Review Board at The College of William & Mary. Enclosed you will find a brief description of the study, the survey instrument, and additional information that will be sent to participants. After reviewing the enclosed information, I hope that you will grant permission for this research to be completed within your school district. I will contact you on \_\_\_\_\_ to answer any questions or provide additional information. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above address and telephone number or by e-mail at The College of William & Mary at [lofloy@wm.edu](mailto:lofloy@wm.edu). Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Loury O. Floyd  
Doctoral Candidate  
The College of William & Mary

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